

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Rogues' Rule

by Fred
MacIsaac

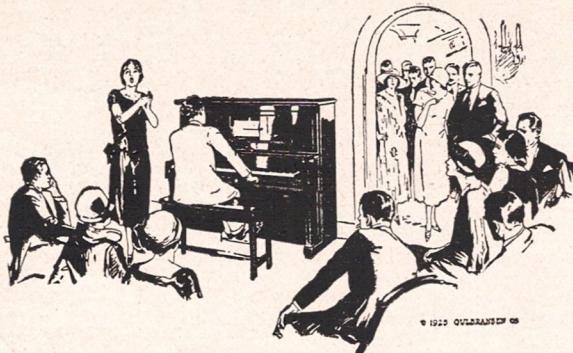
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OCTOBER 10

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXXII

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NUMBER 3

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MIX AND SERVE

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Once in a *great* while—and, surely, this is one of the "onces"—an author can pack real chuckles into cold type. Mr. Franklin has done this in his sprightly farce about Henry Wells of Burnstown. Poor Henry! Meet him next week. And don't fail to read the introduction!

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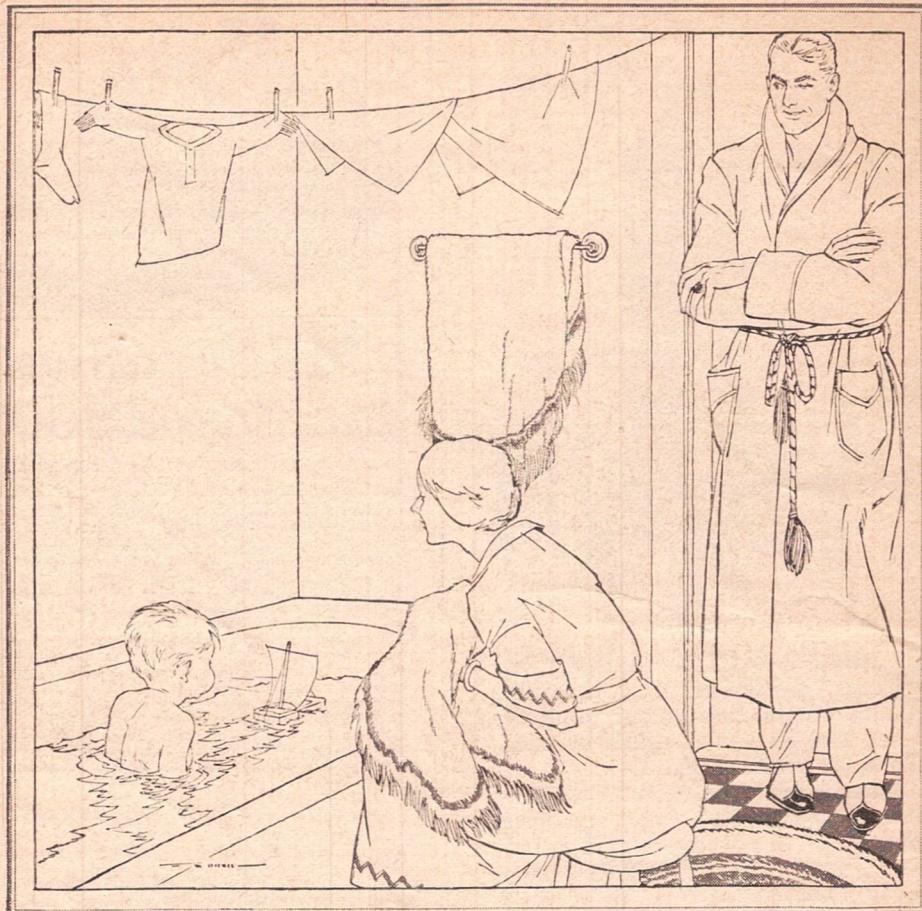
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To a second fiddle

When the Really Important Male arrives, you, sir, the so-called head of the house, become a thing to be "hushed" at and shunted into ignominious corners. Feminine whisperings and the rustling of starched linen fill the electrified air.

Even that tiled temple of cleanliness where you have been wont to splash and carol of a morning is invaded by His New Lordship's ladies-in-waiting.

Garments of curious design dominate the towel rack—bottles of unfamiliar outline and content are everywhere.

But one old friend remains to greet your eye—for there in its accustomed place, in all

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Take comfort in the sight, for Ivory is the bond that will draw you and your son together—the bridge across the vast crevasse of feminine interference.

Another Ivorian is in the making!

Let spotless walls be spangled with gobs of creamy Ivory lather. Let the floor be dotted with soapy pools.

For by these signs, you know that this son of yours is doing all the messy, woman-worrying, soul-satisfying things that normal men do when enjoying an Ivory bath.

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Guess Ivory is the younger generation of the man's size cake. A real chip off the old block for 5 cents.

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Rogues' Rule

By **FRED MACISAAC**

Author of "Kidnaped By Request," "Soft Money," etc.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCING A POPULAR MAN.

WHEN John Flanders was twelve years old, he had a fight with a boy, named Lem Toadsby, who was two years older than himself. Although he was badly beaten, he won a victory, for he had come upon Toadsby when he was torturing a cat and, while the battle waged, the animal made good its escape.

Toadsby was the son of the village butcher, a hulking, gangling, mean-looking youth, whom John had always disliked and whom he hated after that incident. He

promised himself that he would grow tall and strong so that he could fight Toadsby again, some day, and this time emerge the conqueror. But the parents of John Flanders elected to send him to a preparatory school a hundred miles from Bennington, where they lived, and before his first vacation they had moved to Dudley, a city of three hundred thousand inhabitants, about ten miles from the village of Bennington.

He spent six years at prep school, three years at Harvard and three years at Harvard law. During these twelve years, he had completely forgotten his ancient enemy, Lem Toadsby.

His parents had died while he was at law school, but he wished to practice in his home city, so he returned to Dudley, and in partnership with Fred Everett, a law school man of the class just preceding his, opened an office.

Neither had much money, but they had courage, perseverance, intelligence and a fair-sized circle of friends; nevertheless, they gained little save experience during their first six months in business. Then Jim Scott, a classmate of Flanders during his college course, dropped in on them with their first case. It was a suit for damages by a man who had fallen on an icy sidewalk outside one of Scott's apartment houses. The lawyer for the plaintiff was Lem Toadsby.

When he read the name on the summons, John's mind hurtled back over the years and he saw again the lank, lumbering fourteen-year-old boy, who was trying to pull a cat's tail out of the socket. A flash of hate ran through him; it was the first time that he had given the fellow a thought in twelve years, though he knew, since his return to Dudley, that Lem had become a successful politician, had studied law and passed the bar without the delay of a college education, and was supposed to have a fairly flourishing criminal and damage-case practice.

"Lem Toadsby, I know him," he said. "He can't be much of a lawyer, and as a boy he was a rotter."

"Don't kid yourself, Jack," said Scott. "He is a very able man, has a big pull, has made a hit in the State Senate by championing popular bills, and is generally pretty well thought of. He'll trim you on this case if you don't watch your step. You may know the law, but he knows the tricks."

"He won't beat this firm unless he has the law on his side," declared Fred Everett.

"Humph," grunted Scott. "You have not been up against many of our local judges and juries. I expect you to lose the case, but it will give you some practice. You'll win enough for me later on to make up for this."

After he had left, the partners joined in singing his praises.

"Not many fellows would give a couple of briefless lawyers a case that he was sure

they would lose," commented Flanders. "Jim is one in a million."

"Look at what you did for him," replied his partner. "It's his first chance to even up the score."

There was some truth in this statement. Jim Scott had been very wild in college, and his father, the richest man in Dudley, had cut him off, egged on by a stepmother, who did not like him.

It happened that Jack Flanders had been able to bring Jim up with a round turn, saved him from being expelled from college, and was instrumental in reconciling him with his father. The old man had died shortly afterwards and Jim had come into a large fortune as well as the trusteeship of his stepmother's share of the estate. And now he and his stepmother were excellent friends, lived amicably in the big home in Everton, a suburb of Dudley, with Mary Trafford, a niece of Mrs. Scott, whom she had taken to her heart when the girl's mother died.

Jim Scott had been back in Dudley three years before Jack got out of law school and tacked up his shingle. One of the busiest men in the town, he had found time to renew the old friendship, and now he had thrown some business to his onetime benefactor.

The young lawyers worked very hard on the Thompson case, and demonstrated to their satisfaction that the injuries to Thompson had been received on an icy sidewalk which ran along a vacant lot adjoining the Scott apartment house; that the injured man had no witnesses to prove he had fallen on the Scott pavement, which was properly cleaned. On the contrary, they found two tenants in the apartment who had seen the man fall and noted the spot. Quite satisfied, they had come into court, laid their facts before judge and jury, and awaited a verdict.

And then Lem Toadsby intervened. The awkward, gangling boy, with his long nose and wide mouth full of yellow, jagged teeth, had improved immeasurably during the years that had passed. A dentist had taken care of the teeth, his face had grown fuller, which made the nose less objectionable. His voice was rather pleasant, and his man-

ner ingratiating and placating. He gave the impression of extreme shyness. He seemed to be one who hated to attract attention. To the jury, he was just one of themselves; to the judge, a poor, struggling, young lawyer, overawed by the importance of the magistrate.

He began by deprecating himself; he said it was a misfortune that the poor plaintiff had to be represented by a young fellow who had taught himself law, who had little education, who was just a man of the people, while the defendant could employ two brilliant Harvard graduates.

Then he told of visiting the home of Thompson, of the destitution of the wife and children of the injured man. He dwelt on the great wealth of Jim Scott and asked if it was right that such a rich man should fight a case where a poor man sought only justice. He said frankly that he would call no witnesses; that the other side could probably bring in three witnesses to his one. He would only appeal to the jury to remember the suffering man, his heartbroken wife and his starving children.

The jury brought in a verdict of \$2,000 for the defendant and that settled that. All the firm of Flanders and Everett could do was appeal, and leave the courtroom in a dazed condition. How a lawyer could have deliberately avoided the facts so clearly proven, and how a jury could be so benighted as to set pathos, in fact, bathos, above evidence was a mystery to Jack and Fred, but they had lost the case as Jim Scott had predicted.

Jim dropped in on them that afternoon to find them sitting disconsolately in their office still mulling things over.

"Cheer up, boys," he told them. "I knew he would lick you."

"We'll beat him on the appeal," declared Jack stoutly.

"I doubt it. He'll probably know how to manage that, just as he managed this one. I'm settling the case for \$1,500. I bet Lem puts \$1,000 in his pocket and gives his poor client \$500."

"Do you think he is crooked?"

"I have no evidence, but lawyers of his stripe usually are."

"He reminds me of Uriah Heep,"

growled Everett. "He's so darned humble. I wanted to kick him when he was complaining how lowly and ignorant he was and how we were a couple of brilliant Harvard graduates. He must have been laughing inwardly, for he knew we were a couple of poor saps without experience or intelligence."

"Forget it, boys. How much do I owe you?"

"For losing your case?" asked Jack. "You ought to make us pay the verdict for being so dumb. You owe us nothing, of course."

"Well, come out to the house for dinner to-night. I want you to meet my cousin Mary, and my mother will be glad to see you again, Jack. She's grateful to you for fixing things up for me with father."

"I can't go," said Fred. "But you run along, Jack. Maybe it will help you forget Lem Toadsby, the mealy-mouthed hypocrite!"

CHAPTER II.

AND A VERY LOVELY GIRL.

WHEN Jack arrived at the Scott mansion in Everton, shortly before seven that evening, he was greeted at the door with a rather enigmatic smile by Jim.

"Got a little surprise for you," he remarked as he shook hands.

"Really? What?"

"You'll find out in a minute."

Mrs. Scott welcomed him with great cordiality. She was a rather full-blown woman of forty, blond, bustling, opinionated and well-groomed. Jack had heard that she was quite active in politics, head of several women's clubs, eager in the uplift.

His eye passed beyond her to Mary Trafford, whom he had never seen. Mary stood smiling, a girl of twenty with a pair of brown eyes that seemed to melt as he looked into them. The eyes were all he saw at first, then he observed that they belonged in a lovely face, a dark, serious face despite the smile, that of a girl who would cling, and believe, and be true to anyone whom she came to love.

She was a small girl, only an inch or two over five feet, a dainty, demure girl, the sort of girl that Jack had been waiting for during all his twenty-four years. His whole heart went out to her as she stood there to be introduced, and he was so engrossed that he could only stammer and stutter, which caused the brown eyes to dance a bit.

"And this gentleman, I am sure you must know," said Mrs. Scott, effusively.

Struggling to his feet, with a diffident embarrassed look, was Lem Toadsby. This was Jim's surprise, this was the occasion for the curious smile with which he greeted Jack. The loathsome Toadsby in this house, apparently on friendly terms with the hostess and her niece!

"How do you do, Mr. Toadsby," said Flanders curtly. All the joy of the occasion had been banished by this objectionable personality.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Flanders," said Lem, putting out a big, bony hand. "I hope you haven't any hard feelings about the case to-day."

"I certainly do not hold this beating against you," said Jack. "You sure know how to handle a jury, Mr. Toadsby."

"That's the spirit," said Toadsby, with disgusting friendliness. "We used to know each other when we were boys, Mrs. Scott."

"Really?" said the lady. "How wonderful."

"Yes, I remember Mr. Toadsby as a boy very well," said Jack, meaningly. "He was always kind to animals."

"They are God's creatures like ourselves," retorted Lem, but Jack caught a vindictive flash in his eye.

They went in to dinner immediately. Toadsby took in Mary Trafford, while Jack offered his arm to Mrs. Scott. Jim brought up the rear.

"I am glad you young men know each other," said Mrs. Scott. "I should imagine you would be great friends. You are both so clean and honest." Jim choked on a mouthful of soup, but Toadsby rose to the occasion.

"I'm no better than I ought to be," he said, humbly. "I try to do the best I can. Mr. Flanders is clever. I'm not and I don't pretend to be."

"The idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Scott. "Why, Mr. Toadsby has done more for the people of Dudley than any one there. If he wasn't so disgracefully modest, and honest, I might add, he wouldn't have the predatory corporations against him. Isn't that so, Jim?"

"Toadsby certainly has the confidence of the people of his district," admitted Jim.

"I do my best," replied Toadsby. "I don't like to make enemies, but if the common people aren't properly treated, I just can't stand back and see them imposed upon."

"Quite right," agreed Mrs. Scott. "If there were more men like Mr. Toadsby in the world, it would be a better place for us all to live in. Wouldn't it, Mary?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the girl, eagerly. "Aunt thinks Mr. Toadsby is wonderful and, from what the ladies in her club have told us, he must be."

Jack realized, with a pang, that Mary seemed to like the fellow, to believe in him. Now, how could a girl like that fail to see through an obvious hypocrite?

"Since mother went into politics," said Jim, "she is always around the State House with a carload of bills for the amelioration of the proletariat. Mr. Toadsby is helping her put through some of them."

"Woman Suffrage has saved the country," declared Toadsby. "If more women would come out like Mrs. Scott and take an active interest, it would be well for the nation. I am only the humble servant of workers like Mrs. Scott. They are the ones who are doing big things."

"If there were more men in the State House like you, we should have accomplished wonders, already."

"We mustn't be too hard on them, Mrs. Scott," said Toadsby, gently.

This conversation was making Jack violently ill. That a man who talked like Toadsby could possibly be sincere was ridiculous. He was playing upon the vanity and the good-heartedness of Mrs. Scott to serve his own ends, without any question. His mask of meekness infuriated the young lawyer, the more so as Mary was regarding the legislator most sympathetically.

"We all work according to our lights,"

continued Toadsby. "Perhaps they're better men than I am."

"If they are, why do they vote against our bills?" Mrs. Scott retorted, angrily. "Because they are controlled by the big corporations and serve their masters. But their money can't corrupt a man like you, Mr. Toadsby."

"Money isn't everything," replied the hero, piously. "A clear conscience is better than gold. I've never starved yet, but I'd rather go hungry than fail to do what I believe right. I may make mistakes, but they are of the head, not of the heart."

"What do you think of those sentiments, Mr. Flanders?" demanded Mrs. Scott.

"I'm sure they do Mr. Toadsby credit, if he means them."

This was a break, for Mrs. Scott glared at him; he caught an indignant look from Mary, while Toadsby smiled like an early Christian martyr. Jim Scott coughed warningly, but, upon his stepmother turning her glare upon him, he bent his eyes upon his plate.

"Do you mean to insinuate that our friend is not sincere?" asked Mrs. Scott.

Jack was embarrassed, chiefly because he realized that Mary was angry with him, and he made a soft answer in hope of turning away wrath.

"Not at all," he replied. "I have not heard a thing to Mr. Toadsby's discredit. On the contrary."

"You wouldn't in Dudley. I believe he is the only honest man in politics in that city and I know conditions there are worse than in the rest of the State."

"Now, Mrs. Scott, you must stop praising me," said Toadsby, in his most humble tone. "I don't blame Mr. Flanders for thinking nobody could be as good as you say I am, and I am sure there are plenty of honest men in Dudley."

Mary changed the subject lest any more acrimony develop at the table and they discussed music and art and literature until coffee had been drunk.

"Let us go into the music room," suggested Mrs. Scott. "Mary will be kind enough to sing for us, I am sure."

"Please do, Miss Trafford," urged Flanders, while Toadsby sighed and said:

"I love to hear your sweet voice, Miss Mary."

"I really can't sing, but I'll try to accommodate you both," she smiled, and preceded them from the dining room. Jack had a chance for a few words with Scott.

"How can you stand having that fellow around?" he demanded.

"My stepmother thinks he is wonderful. He's underfoot all the time. In love with Mary, I believe."

"But, good heavens, you wouldn't consent to that lovely girl marrying a faker like him!"

"I've got nothing to do with it. She's not my relative. But I don't mind telling you I may follow him out of the house some dark night and murder him."

"Fine. I'll help you."

Mary sang in a sweet, unaffected, rather infantile voice, several popular songs. Then Toadsby, who had posted himself beside her to turn the music, suggested some hymns.

"What's the idea?" asked Jim Scott.

Toadsby turned to him and Jack. "They are my favorites," he said simply. "Nothing appeals to me like sacred music."

Jack liked sacred music himself, but he felt that Sunday was the day for it. This was Thursday.

After half a dozen hymns had edified the congregation, Mary closed the book and rose from the piano. Toadsby thanked her profusely.

"You'll pardon me for asking you," he said, "but I love that kind of music, and I just forgot there was company present which might have more secular tastes."

"It was a pleasure, Mr. Toadsby," she smiled. "I think it wonderful for a modern young man to like sacred music."

Mrs. Scott chimed in approvingly. It was evident that she thought a lot of Toadsby. During the rest of the evening, Jack tried to win the interest of Mary, but there seemed to be a conspiracy on the part of the politician and Mrs. Scott to keep him on the sidelines. Mary was gentle and agreeable. It seemed to him that she acted as though she liked him, but his efforts to put their acquaintance on a friendly footing that evening were abortive.

It finally struck eleven o'clock and Toadsby rose to depart. Jack hated the idea of accompanying the man to Dudley, but good taste required that he exit also. He hoped for an invitation to come again, and fished for it rather shamelessly. Mrs. Scott still held rancor for his thoughtless remark at the dinner table and was careful not to issue such an invitation.

"May I call you up, some time," he asked of Mary during a half minute when she offered him her hand.

"Why, really, Mr. Flanders, we had better wait until we know each other longer." That was that. And, to add to his chagrin, he heard his hostess inviting Toadsby to dinner two nights later.

He walked to the trolley car with Toadsby, who began to apologize for winning the damage case that afternoon.

"You owe me no apologies for beating me," said Flanders, curtly. "With your standing in the household, I am surprised you did not handle the case for Jim Scott."

"Oh, I never take a case of a rich man against a poor man. I could not put my heart into it."

"You certainly couldn't make the same kind of jury appeal," agreed Flanders. "Where did you study law?"

"In a law office, while I acted as collector for the firm. I have had few advantages, Mr. Flanders."

"You do pretty well with what you've got. What church do you belong to?"

"I am not affiliated with any particular church. I rather like to sit under different preachers."

"And you make a lot of acquaintances that way."

"Yes, though that is not why I do it. I am really deeply religious."

"Must have come on you since I knew you. Remember that cat you were pulling apart the day you beat me up?"

"Please, Mr. Flanders," said Lem, almost weeping. "Don't recall my boyish, unregenerate days."

"Well, I'm glad to know that you have reformed. Here comes the trolley."

To his relief, the car was crowded and they had to take separate seats, which put a stop to a conversation that might have

grown unpleasant. John felt that Toadsby's armor of sanctimoniousness was getting thin, and his boyhood friend might be out in a few moments more.

In Dudley, he got off before Toadsby, waved his hand, and went to his lodgings.

CHAPTER III.

A FAINT-HEARTED HERO.

DESPITE their loss of the Thompson case the firm of Flanders and Everett began to get some business during the next few weeks. Their argument had made a good impression. Toadsby's jury tricks were discounted by several big lawyers who recommended the youngsters for small suits that they themselves had no time to handle.

Jim Scott threw two or three things their way, and the second case they tried in court they won handily. Fred Everett was an excellent mixer, he was already a member of several clubs, and had become acquainted with a number of the big men in Dudley. Jack saw no more of Mary; as she had not agreed to permit him to telephone and since no more invitations were forthcoming, their acquaintance was at a standstill.

He saw her at the theater twice, escorted by Lem Toadsby, which caused him to lose interest in the play immediately. Toadsby sickened him. He was afraid that the girl would become engaged to the creature; with her aunt infatuated with him, impersonally, of course, there didn't seem to be much chance of opposition. Jim Scott was secretly afraid of his stepmother; he was unlikely to interfere. And it would be a terrible mistake for Mary, he felt sure.

He began to make inquiries about the man's career, and he asked Fred to do likewise. What they learned did not reassure him.

"So far as I can find out," said Fred, "Toadsby is secretly connected with Sam Stone, the boss of the ruling party. I have gone over his record in the Legislature and I have noticed that none of his attacks have been against the interests of Stone. He

has made his reputation by championing the women and children and he is strong for the babies."

"But he attacked the Dairy Goods companies, and Stone is supposed to be a heavy investor in several of them."

Fred laughed. "He attacked the Thompson Dairy Goods Company. He claimed they put impure ingredients in their butter and cheese. He couldn't prove it, but he hurt their business considerably, and every customer who left them went over to the Crafts Dairy Goods Company. Stone used to be in both of them, but all his holdings have been in Crafts for several years.

"The previous session he made charges against the Fales Milk Company, the Standard Candy Company and the Stockton Ginger Ale Company."

"To the great profit of their competitors?"

"Yes, and when the investigations were made he didn't have a thing on any of them. Frank Good happened to be in the Legislature the day he went after the Thompson Dairy Goods people. He introduced the most damning bill ever read, and then, in his Uriah Heep manner, he said that some more able member than he could handle the case much better. But the bill was so just and the offenses of the company so terrible—killing thousands of innocent children was about the mildest charge he made—that it could be introduced by a child and not defeated by a Webster.

"And when the State chemists reported that the Thompson stuff was pure, he got up and apologized to everybody in this world and the next. He added that every time the downtrodden people were mistreated, inferior though his ability undoubtedly was, he would use it in their defense. Whereupon the women spectators crowded around and gave him an ovation. In defeat he won a victory. Though he might be mistaken he was the fearless champion of the people. Most of them believed that the State chemists were bought and lots of them won't patronize Thompson, even now."

"Did he have to apologize to the other concerns?"

"That's the best thing he does; he does it when he doesn't need to, so an apology from him in cases like these carries no weight."

"Fred, it's terrible to think of a gorgeous girl like Mary Trafford being victimized by that fellow."

"Well, go out and trim him with her. You are better looking, better bred, wittier, cleverer and decenter. Why let him walk off with the prize without a contest?"

"I haven't got a look in. I only met her once and she gave me no encouragement. She wouldn't even let me call her up."

"You asked permission? Why, you helpless jellyfish! Why didn't you call her up? Go out and buy a couple of tickets for a show. Then phone her and ask her to go with you."

"But suppose she turns me down."

"Take a chance, man. If she turns you down, call her up in a couple of days and invite her somewhere else. Ask her to let you call on her. She can't bite you over the telephone. Here is Toadsby all over the place, and you never go near her. How does the poor girl know you are interested in her if you don't ask her?"

"I suppose you're right," said Jack slowly.

"Of course. You weren't such a boob with girls in college."

"Yes, but I never loved any of them. It makes a difference."

"My boy, it's your Christian duty to prevent her marrying that hypocritical politician. Go out and be a martyr."

"I'll call her up this afternoon."

"Do it now. There's the phone."

Jack was ashamed to refuse the dare. He looked up the number of the Scott home in Everton and asked for Miss Trafford. In a moment a sweet voice came on the line.

"This is Miss Trafford."

Jack tried to speak, but his throat was dry. He moistened his lips.

"Hit the line fiercely," urged Fred, who was controlling his laughter with difficulty.

"Did anybody call me?" asked Mary.

"Yes, Miss Trafford," answered Jack in a weak voice. "It's me, Jack Flanders."

"Oh, Mr. Flanders, how nice of you."

"It's a fine day," said Jack.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Fred Everett.

"Yes, indeed," said Mary politely. There was silence. Then she said: "Was that why you called me, to tell me it was a nice day?"

"Yes, no—er—no."

"Then you had something to tell me."

"I—er—wondered if you would go to the play at the Globe Friday night."

"How sweet of you," cooed Mary. "But I have already promised to attend the play. I'm going with Mr. Toadsby."

"Oh," said Jack. "Well—er—good-by."

"Good-by. Thank you for calling."

Jack wiped his forehead. He looked pathetically at his partner.

"Of all the inane, idiotic, bone-headed, jackass conversations that I ever heard on the telephone, that was the worst," said Fred. "What was the idea of you saying good-by? Why didn't you let her do it? Why didn't you give her a line of talk. She thinks you are a bigger boob than you are, and that's going some."

"Don't," said Jack weakly. "I was never so scared in my life."

"Say, if a girl gave me as much encouragement as she did just now, I'd be out there on the next trolley. I heard every word she said."

"I'll call her again later and think up something to say beforehand," said Jack, beginning to recover. "You really thought she wasn't sore because I called her up?"

"No, stupid. I think she was tickled until she found you were a moron. And you were the best debater ever turned out of Harvard Law. What does Blackstone say in regard to a case like this?"

Thus he changed the subject.

The city of Dudley, which had more than three hundred thousand inhabitants, had abolished the regular party designations at the polls several years before this period in its history, in the interest of good government.

In place of the two old parties had grown up two others, styled Liberty Hall and Independence Hall, respectively. Liberty Hall had a strangle hold on the city government, and was ruled absolutely by Sam

Stone. His organization had grown so that it included the county which was all within the city limits, and the Liberty Hall ring nominated and elected the district attorney and other county officers three times out of four. For the past three years the district attorney had been J. K. Baker, and Baker had acquired a reputation, through carrying out Stone's instructions, that worried the astute czar of the city and county.

A district attorney is a very powerful individual, and in his prerogative of non-prosecuting any case which seemed to him unworthy of prosecution, he owns a power for graft that is astonishing.

Certain lawyers in the Liberty Hall ring seemed to be able to get cases non-prosecuted without difficulty, while attorneys not in favor, had to fight their clients' battles against all the powers of the office.

It was rumored that big criminals, who were sure of conviction, paid large sums to somebody so that their cases would not come to trial. Even more serious charges were whispered about. It was said that certain shady lawyers framed wealthy citizens so that they were taken by officers of the law in positions which would have ruined them if brought to trial even though they were acquitted by a jury. Such men were supposed to have contributed enormously to these blackmailing lawyers whose influence with the district attorney was so great that the cases were thrown out without publicity.

Sam Stone had decided that the time had come to clean out the office of district attorney and vindicate Liberty Hall by nominating some attorney whose reputation was spotless and whose vote-getting ability was so great that it would prevent Independence Hall from having a look in. His candidate had to be such an individual as would appeal to the churches, the women and the better element, and also somebody who would not prevent the boss from continuing to draw his regular income from the district attorney's office.

As Lem Toadsby was a member of the State Senate he was elected as a Republican, but in Dudley he affiliated with Independence Hall. Sam Stone, as Flanders and Everett had gathered, was in close touch

with Toadsby, but their connection was most profitable because it was secret.

If Stone indorsed a member of Independence Hall as candidate for district attorney, it was very natural that Independence Hall would nominate him and there would be no contest. So he quietly laid his plans to spring Lem as a reform candidate at the proper moment and to show his own jealousy for the fair name of Dudley by getting behind him with his organization. It was a pretty plan. Perhaps it would have succeeded, as did most of Sam Stone's schemes, had it not been that Jack Flanders was in love with the girl who seemed to be on the point of becoming engaged to Lem Toadsby. Certainly nothing but a strong personal motive would have dragged Jack, and with him Fred Everett, into the mire of politics at a time when all their energies were needed to build up their slender law business.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOSS SELECTS A CANDIDATE.

ONE dark evening, about a week after Jack Flanders made his feeble effort to converse over the telephone with Mary Trafford, the Hon. Sam Stone met Lem Toadsby at a hotel in a city about fifty miles from Dudley.

Stone was a contradiction of the popular idea of a political boss; in fact no person could possibly be a successful boss who resembled the popular conception of the rôle. A big boss is a diplomat of the highest rank, he is smooth as silk, suave as a dancing master, keen-witted, good-natured, pleasant in speech and manner, a likable sort of man.

Stone had risen from a lowly origin by force of his ability and his lack of conventional scruples. He had conceived politics as a business like everything else, appreciated the low type of men who often ran for public office and realized how simple a matter it would be to manipulate them.

In appearance he was about five feet ten, he weighed a hundred and seventy pounds, he was well dressed, a bit gray and smooth

shaven. His smile was rather magnetic; his desire was to make friends. He hated nobody, did not feel that he could afford to cherish enmity, and when he punished treachery on the part of his followers it was for purposes of discipline rather than animosity.

Lem Toadsby amused him greatly. His first experience with the fellow had been several years before when the champion of the people called upon him with a demand which happened to be in line with Stone's desires. He made a friend of Toadsby by granting him the favor, flattered him, offered his services in other matters. He penetrated instantly the shell of Lem's hypocrisy, saw that the man was a pushing, selfish, unprincipled demagogue whose only real interests were his advancement. It was an easy matter for him to do business with Lem while he conspired with him to preserve an appearance of open hostility.

He had shown Lem how he could increase his popularity by introducing the bills for investigation of food companies and at the same time make money for himself from the competitors of the concerns investigated. Lem had served as Stone's cat's-paw at the Legislature in diverse ways, and was quite persuaded that his alliance with the boss was a deep secret.

On this occasion Stone was registered at a certain hotel and Lem was given the number of his room over the telephone. Lem entered hastily, went directly to the room and knocked. The boss was puffing contentedly at a cigar and reading a volume of Amy Lowell's biography of Keats. It happened that Sam was an admirer of the poet Keats.

"If it isn't Saint Anthony himself," he observed when Lem had pussy-footed inside and closed the door stealthily. "Come, sit down, Lemuel, and assist yourself to a drink of pre-war Scotch."

"I never touch the accursed stuff," declared Toadsby virtuously.

"The more fool you. Now to business. How would you like to be the district attorney of Dudley?"

Lem's eyes glowed. "More than anything in the world, Mr. Stone."

"Promise to be a good boy if elected?"

"I shall do my duty."

"Your duty is to do what I tell you, is that clear?"

"You certainly would not ask me to do anything contrary to my oath of office?"

"Certainly not. Only I want the privilege of non prossing any case I see fit, and advising you now and then. The salary is rather small and you will find my co-operation much more profitable."

"You have found me willing to oblige you in the past, Mr. Stone."

"Yes, and you have shared the loot. I can't be bothered with your sanctimoniousness to-night. Straight from the shoulder, will you obey orders and share the swag?"

Lem made a wry face, gulped, but said: "Yes."

"Fine. Now here is the idea. I come out for a non-partisan candidate for district attorney. I ask various civic bodies to suggest the best men for nomination by Liberty Hall. I want the women's clubs to suggest you. Can you line up Mrs. Scott and her gang?"

"I think so," said Lem. "Mrs. Scott certainly is grateful for my poor services in introducing her bills."

"Can you get her to swallow my endorsement of you and round up her skirt brigade for Liberty Hall? You can explain to her that you enter the office with no pledges and you have forced me to accept you."

"I feel sure of it," declared Lem.

"Good. She suggests you as the women's candidate. I accept you and make Liberty Hall nominate you. As you nominally stand with Independence Hall, that gang will just naturally have to indorse you and we have a clear field and no contest."

"But when I am in office, Mr. Stone, they will naturally scrutinize my actions and it will ruin me if you make me do things that are not ethical. I must nominate assistants who will stand as well with the reform element as myself."

"I'll take care of your assistants. Remember that you are in for four years and when you are through you can retire with an independent fortune. Baker is quitting with half a million dollars."

"But I have political ambitions."

"If you are a good boy I'll make you governor."

"I am afraid there are a number of politicians and lawyers who do not like me; just because I am religious by nature they think I am a hypocrite."

"So you are; a canting, psalm-singing hypocrite. If you were not I wouldn't put you in office. I need a religious atmosphere to take the curse off Baker. You haven't fooled any intelligent attorney, and most of the politicians are on to you, but I think I can beat them into line. The point is that you have the women bunched and we need their votes. Now get out of here. I'll come out with a statement in the newspapers, offering to nominate the noblest, cleanest candidate suggested by the reformers and you see that your name is suggested."

"I want to thank you for the confidence you are reposing in me."

"I'm not reposing any confidence in you. I wouldn't trust you farther than I can see you, but I've got the goods on you, my boy. I could send you to jail for one or two little things, and so you are just the man I want for district attorney. Say, did you ever read any poems by Keats?"

"No," said Lem, trembling with rage, but afraid to express his feelings.

"You ought. Quote him when you are talking to the women. Poetry knocks them cuckoo."

Lem left him deep in the biography. He paused outside the door, looked up and down the corridor, saw that it was empty and shook his fist at his benefactor. Then, having relieved his feelings, he remembered that he was the next district attorney, threw back his shoulders and strutted out of the hotel.

CHAPTER V.

TOADSBY WEAVES A SPELL.

A SCOTTISH poet made the remark that women are kittle kattle, the translation of which means that they are rather weird and inexplicable. Take the case of Mary Trafford who was

sitting on the porch of the big Scott residence the next afternoon working on some funny kind of embroidery.

She ought to have been thinking about Lem Toadsby who, it seemed likely, would be her future husband. Lem was the sort of person that you began by pitying and ended by loving—perhaps. Mary had a sort of protective liking for Lem. He was so shrinking, diffident, meek and good. It seemed remarkable that a man who appeared so ill-fitted to go out into the world of masterful men, should manage to hold his own with them.

How he had ever been able to become a political power was a mystery to Mary for, when he was with her, he seemed to need shielding and protecting. It must be that he was a sort of instrument of Providence; when moved by the spirit he could accomplish things far beyond his strength. Certainly there never had been a man whose motives were so noble and whose championship of the weak and oppressed was so sturdy.

She was not a girl of decided opinions herself; she was the helpless, clinging-vine type, sweet and loving, permitting her opinions to be formed for her by others, the type of girl that men persist in admiring, though fashion and feminism declare that woman will remain no longer a clinging dependent. It's a funny thing about fashion; it rules women, it has changed them into independent, assertive, semi-masculine creatures who still demand man's admiration, and get it, but strangely enough the average man overlooks the finest development of modern woman and seeks the old-fashioned kind. When he finds one he snaps her up because he knows the competition will be cruel. It's so with the fashionable figure also. Women adore the straight line, the boyish form, but men still hanker after soft feminine curves and marry them when they locate them.

Mary should have been thinking about the peerless Lem Toadsby, but strangely enough the half smile on her lips was due to her meditations regarding Jack Flanders, the silly creature who had rung her up a week ago and had been tongue-tied. Compared to Lem, Flanders was nobody. He

had the advantages of a college education, which Lem had not, but he was a comparatively briefless attorney. His manner was confident and assured, but the shrinking violet, Toadsby, had beaten him in the only case which he had tried against the self-taught lawyer, and was in a way to become a famous man, perhaps Governor of the State, even President of the United States, while Jack would probably never amount to anything.

Yet he had nice eyes and a pleasant voice even though he couldn't talk much over a telephone. She would have liked to know Jack better. He might be amusing.

At times Lem's continual conversation about the uplift bored Mary; she would have enjoyed chatter about tennis and golf, the football scores and the latest dance step. Mary was wondering if it wouldn't be proper to call up Mr. Flanders and invite him out some evening, since it appeared that he didn't intend to follow up his own initial telephone call.

Then she saw, turning in at the gate, no less an individual than the Hon. Lem Toadsby himself. Lem wore his customary cutaway black coat and his black slouch hat, the trademark of the budding statesman. As he was very angular the costume did not become him any too well, and she wished his zeal for the common people would permit him time to go to a good tailor and get some clothes made that fitted him.

Mrs. Scott had seen him from a window and she was already on the porch waving a greeting.

"This is a surprise, Mr. Toadsby. Mary, run and get the cook to make him a glass of lemonade. It's a hot day and he has been walking a long distance by the looks of him."

Mary whisked into the house as Lem ascended the steps.

"This is a surprise, Mr. Toadsby," fluttered Mrs. Scott. "You are so busy one never expects to see you in the afternoon. I just sent Mary into the house to prepare you some lemonade."

"How good of you both! I know I am intruding and taking up your time, but there is a little matter of political news

which I should like you to become acquainted with at once."

"Sit down, please," she commanded. "Now tell me all about it."

"You have said a lot about conditions in the city of Dudley being very bad, and while I hate to admit that my native city has fallen into wicked ways, I am afraid it is true enough."

"Of course it's true."

"Things are so bad at the district attorney's office that Sam Stone has decided to sacrifice Baker and clean up the office."

"Well, this is certainly good news!"

"Isn't it? He claims to be sincere in wanting the office run properly."

"Do you think he is?"

"I am inclined to think so. Every now and then these corrupt bosses find it desirable to yield to public clamor. Now, Stone is issuing a statement that he will indorse for the office the best man suggested by the various reform organizations, the women voters, the churches, and the ministers. It seems to me that the women of Dudley and the surrounding towns should take him at his word and get together on a candidate who would really be a reformer. If he refuses to indorse your man, he is convicted of insincerity."

"This is perfectly wonderful!" declared Mrs. Scott. "We certainly shall pin the old scoundrel down to the letter of his word. I know just the man to nominate for district attorney of Dudley, and all the members of the women's clubs will agree with me."

"He will have to be a very popular man and a good lawyer," Lem admonished her. "Stone must be forced to admit that the candidate is well qualified for the office."

Mrs. Scott stood up and made a mock curtsey in front of Lem.

"My candidate is Lem Toadsby," she declared.

Lem presented an interesting study in surprise, modesty, self-deprecation, and smugness.

"Oh, Mrs. Scott," he protested, "surely not me! You need a much better man than I am, really you do."

"There isn't another lawyer in Dudley

fit to tie your shoes. You will clean up the city, protect the rights of the people, and check the encroachments of the corporations."

"I would like very much having a chance to do those things," Lem admitted; "but I am afraid you overestimate me, and perhaps none of the other prominent club women will agree with you."

"They'll agree with me," Mrs. Scott said grimly. "I'll spend fifty thousand dollars of my own money to elect you, and I'll raise a campaign fund of a quarter of a million if necessary."

"I hope it won't be necessary. It would give our opponents a chance to say we were trying to buy the election. You would not be afraid to have me indorsed by Sam Stone and Liberty Hall?"

"Any other man might be influenced by Stone; not you."

Mary returned at this minute bearing a tray containing three glasses of lemonade.

"A toast, Mary," said her aunt. "Here is to the next district attorney of Dudley, Lem Toadsby."

"Really, Mr. Toadsby?" demanded Mary. "Are you the next district attorney? How wonderful! That's a very high office, isn't it?"

"Much too high for me," admitted Lem. "Your aunt is very optimistic. The boss, Sam Stone, has agreed to indorse a candidate named by the women and the reform forces, and your aunt is kind enough to insist that I stand for the office."

"My goodness," laughed Mary, "won't the evildoers of Dudley be terrified if you are elected, and you and aunt get after them? I suppose you won't let any naughty shows come to town like the one I saw with you last week."

"It was shocking," said Lem. "I apologized at the time for taking you, but I didn't know anything about it."

"It didn't shock me. I thought it was funny."

"You may be sure I won't permit such things."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Mrs. Scott, clapping her hands.

"The real reason I seek political preferment in addition to doing good is to win

your approval, Miss Mary," said Lem, looking her as directly in the eye as it was possible for him to regard any one.

Mary flushed a little, but made a laughing reply, and then the party became a ways and means committee for the nomination of Lem Toadsby.

A week later the women's general committee sent out a statement to the newspapers that they had indorsed Lem Toadsby as a candidate for district attorney. The Reform Society had rejected Lem with discouraging promptness on the ground that his record as a lawyer did not justify his holding such an important office, and put forward the name of James Sturgis, of the firm of Sturgis and Sturgis, one of the biggest, most public-spirited and skillful attorneys in Dudley.

Mrs. Scott, who had appeared personally before the committee of the reformers in charge of nominations, was furious at their decision, lost her temper in the meeting, made violent statements regarding the sincerity of the members, and departed in high dudgeon.

The following day the executive committee of Liberty Hall, which was completely owned by Sam Stone, announced that they would nominate Lem Toadsby out of deference to the desires of the women voters and because of his fine record in the Legislature as a defender of the people against the corporations.

Mr. Stone pointed out that Toadsby was a political opponent of Liberty Hall; that his indorsement was a splendid example of non-partisan spirit; and demanded that Independence Hall nominate one of its own members who was already indorsed by the women and the opposition party. Lem met the committee of Independence Hall, promised them everything they asked, and walked off with their nomination.

He was in the position of being the nominee of both the regular political parties in Dudley, and carried the indorsement of the associated women's clubs as well. Against him was a small coterie of intelligent reformers with a fine candidate and no organization. Mrs. Scott in a public statement called upon Sturgis to withdraw in the interest of harmony.

Lem Toadsby was riding on top of the world.

CHAPTER VI.

JACK REFUSES AN INVITATION.

JACK FLANDERS had watched the astonishing campaign of Lem Toadsby with mingled feelings of resentment and admiration. How could a fellow whose intelligence was apparently so limited, whose personality was obnoxious, whose hypocrisy was so apparent, pull the wool over the eyes of well-meaning people so ingeniously? Here was a man whom he believed to be dishonest being indorsed by all parties for an office for which he was particularly ill-fitted.

Sturgis he had liked from the first time he met him. The big attorney had been very kind to the youngsters. Fred was better acquainted with him than Jack, and was most enthusiastic over his suggested nomination.

"I hope he sticks in the fight," Fred declared. "If he does, it's up to us to take the stump for him. It's a forlorn hope with both gangs lined up against him, and he won't have a very strong campaigning force. Let's go over to his office now and tell him we're with him."

Jack put on his hat without reply and they called upon Sturgis.

James Sturgis was over sixty, a clean-cut, stalwart gentleman of the old school. He received the young men with great courtesy and heard their felicitations with a pleased smile.

"Sit down, boys," he said. "I'm delighted to have you with me. I am going to stay in the fight until the last vote is counted, although I know I haven't a chance of election. It's unfortunate that we can't tell the people the real facts in this situation, but there is no use in making charges without proofs. It is my personal opinion that Toadsby is a crook."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," declared Jack. "I think so too, only I'm prejudiced against him. If you say so, it's because you know what you are talking about."

"I know quite a little. I also know Sam Stone. For the past four years he has drawn an enormous income from the district attorney's office, and he hasn't any intention of abandoning that source of revenue. If he has indorsed the candidate of the women's clubs, it is because he has a secret understanding with Toadsby that things will go on as usual when that champion of the people is elected.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he cooked up this whole situation so that Toadsby would be handed him as a candidate by the women, instead of his being compelled to show his hand by nominating him directly. I am in the situation of running independently while both political organizations are working together for Toadsby. I must try to build up my own organization in the next six weeks, and that's where you boys will come in handy. You must realize that I hate this hopeless contest, but I can't sit by and let a man whom I know is dishonest be elected to office by acclamation."

"I'll take off my coat and run errands for you," declared Fred. "Jack and I will stump the tough wards and tackle all the hard jobs. We'll give this psalm singer a run for his money."

Sturgis smiled at their enthusiasm; then he hesitated for a moment, made a decision.

"I'll take you boys into my confidence," he said. "I have conclusive evidence, so far as my own opinion is concerned, that Toadsby is crooked. This is how I got my information:

"There is a young lawyer in town named Munroe, who had a damage case against one of my best clients, and it was a good case, and I knew we had to settle. As I happened to be passing his office building, one afternoon, I thought I'd drop in on Munroe and try to adjust the damage.

"It was at the time that Toadsby was attacking the Thompson Dairy Goods Company in the Senate, charging they made impure butter and cheese. We used a lot of their stuff in my home, and I always found it all right, but I supposed Toadsby was just the ordinary demagogue trying to make a reputation by injuring others. Mun-

roe was out, but his stenographer said he would return in a moment. She showed me into his private office, leaving the door open.

"A moment later he entered as the girl was on the telephone, so that she didn't have time to tell him I was waiting. He sat down at a desk in the outer office, turned on the desk lamp, took something out of his pocket and scrutinized it. I had risen and approached him, and, without any intention of prying, my eye fell upon the paper he was reading. It was a check for twenty thousand dollars signed by Thatcher Wallace, treasurer of the Crafts Dairy Goods Company. Munroe turned, saw me, crumpled up the check, thrust it in his pocket, turned pale, and behaved in a curiously guilty fashion.

"Munroe was much too young and poor a lawyer to be attorney for the Crafts people, and I naturally wondered how he happened to have so large a check from them. However, I would have thought little of it had he not acted like a thief caught burglarizing a safe. He was so confused I made an excellent settlement with him in the interests of my client, and I left the office.

"Next day, shortly after twelve o'clock, I was walking from the courthouse with Tom Clapp, one of my office staff, toward our regular lunching place, when I noticed Munroe just ahead of me. He turned into a small café, and we passed on our way. Fifty feet farther on I saw Lem Toadsby, head down, coat tails flying, coming toward us. I got one of those flashes of intuition that often wins cases for lawyers, and, as Toadsby passed without seeing us, I grasped Clapp's arm.

"'Let's see where he goes,' I said in a low tone. Toadsby entered the same café into which Munroe had passed. Even that was not significant. It was a cheap place, where poor attorneys might congregate. 'Go in there, Tom, and see if he speaks to Munroe,' I told Clapp, who immediately trotted in. I knew that he was not known to either man. Wait a minute; Clapp will tell you what he saw."

He pressed a buzzer, and a brisk young clerk hastened to respond.

"Clapp, these are two friends and supporters of mine, Fred Everett and John Flanders. I want you to tell them what you saw in the café near the water front on the occasion you know of."

"Certainly," smiled Clapp. "I was hot on Toadsby's heels. The place was almost empty. Munroe sat at a table in a far corner. Toadsby immediately sat opposite him, although there were many vacant tables. I sat on the other side of the room. They didn't greet each other, apparently were strangers. Each ordered food, and the waitress hurried away. My back was toward them, but there was a wall mirror through which I could watch them. I saw Munroe shove the biggest roll of bills I ever saw across the table. Toadsby jammed it into his side coat pocket. Then their food came. Toadsby read a newspaper while he ate. Munroe finished first and strolled out. About ten minutes later Toadsby left the place."

"What do you think, gentlemen?"

"I think that Toadsby was paid twenty thousand dollars to attack the Thompson people," said Jack. "The Crafts company had to make out a check for such a large sum so that their books would be correct. Munroe probably had some fake lawsuit against them which was settled in return for the check. He cashed it, met Toadsby by appointment in the café, and turned over the money minus his own commission. It's an open and shut case."

"Yes," agreed Sturgis, "and, unfortunately, so cleverly handled that there isn't anything we can do. The Crafts books show a proper payment to Munroe of twenty thousand dollars. Toadsby got his in cash. Munroe will deny having given it to him. Toadsby denies having received it. There you are."

"Toadsby must have deposited such a large sum somewhere."

"More likely put it in a safety-deposit vault. No, you may be sure he covered his tracks. That's the kind of man who will be our next district attorney."

"And the future husband of Mary Trafford," groaned Jack Flanders inwardly.

At his office, when he returned, he was astonished and delighted to find a message

to call Mary Trafford. Jack's behavior upon receiving the slip from the stenographer was peculiar. He put his hat on the side of his head, assumed a truculent air, and thrust his fist under the nose of his partner.

"So I make no impression on the telephone when I talk to a girl," he said. "I make her think I'm a moron, do I? What do you think of this, Mr. Smart Aleck?"

He thrust the slip containing Mary's number before the eyes of Fred, who grinned, prepared to dodge a blow, and remarked:

"She's probably the kind of girl who likes morons."

Jack was already calling Mary's number, and in a moment she answered.

"Miss Trafford, this is Jack Flanders. I was delighted to find a message to call you. I have been wanting to call you or see you so much, and half a dozen times I was on the point of telephoning you."

"Hey, you've got a rush of words to the head," expostulated Fred. "You're repeating yourself. Steady, old boy, steady."

Jack had run down by this time; Mary was laughing pleasantly, out in Everton.

"How nice of you! What I wanted to ask you, Mr. Flanders, was this: Will you come out to dinner Saturday night? We are having a large party to organize the campaign for Mr. Toadsby."

Poor Jack! His distress was so frightful that Fred became alarmed at his expression of embarrassment.

"I—I—I can't, Miss Trafford," he stammered.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Why not?"

"Well, you see—the fact is—under the circumstances—"

"You don't want to come?" she conjectured.

"I'm against Toadsby. I'm with Sturgis. So I couldn't very well help him organize."

"Oh, Mr. Flanders! My aunt was sure you would make speeches for Mr. Toadsby. What have you got against him?"

"I think Sturgis is the better man."

"I'm sorry we are on opposite sides. I hope you'll reconsider."

"I'm afraid I can't, Miss Trafford."

"Then, good-by."

"Some other time may I come out?"
This was a desperate appeal.

"Under the circumstances, you know, Mr. Flanders."

"Oh, I suppose so," he groaned, and he heard her hang up.

"You poor goof!" commiserated Fred. "The first time she calls you up, it's to do something for Toadsby."

"Isn't that terrible?" exclaimed Jack.

"She'll respect you more for having backbone. It's lucky, though, the call came after you'd seen Sturgis. Otherwise, you would be out braying for Toadsby, the people's friend."

"We are going to have a lot of influence in the district attorney's office," said Jack, "after Toadsby is in."

"It's up to us to see that he doesn't get in. Now, look here, Jack, we have a line on Toadsby. The weak link in this case is this fellow Munroe. If we could get something on Munroe and make him squeal on Toadsby, that whitened sepulcher will be blown sky high. Furthermore, it's the only chance. You realize the election laws protect Independence Hall and Liberty Hall and permit them to have their representatives in every polling place, while an independent candidate is helpless. The two parties' representatives count the votes, and they'll probably stuff the ballot boxes. Who's to stop them? Not that they'll need to do that."

"Hum," considered Jack. "Say, you don't suppose that Mrs. Scott controls the women's vote of the city, do you?"

"Not on your life. She leads a noisy, vociferous little group. Most of the women vote as they please, if they remember to vote, but all women love a parson, and Lem is one, without the parson's white necktie. They will turn out for him, all right."

"Then we have six weeks to turn up Munroe."

"Atta boy!"

"During the next ten days the two young lawyers were exceedingly busy under the direction of Sturgis and the Reform Committee in an effort to effect some sort of organization. It was a deplorable situation.

So far as the members of the Dudley bar were concerned, the vast majority had a pretty accurate conception of the character of Lem Toadsby. Given a powerful opposition they would have lined up gladly against the coalition candidate. But the fight against Lem was admittedly futile; the influence of the district attorney is great, and most of them saw no sense in bringing down upon themselves the animosity of a man who would surely go into that office. Few of them had the courage to come out into the open and support Sturgis.

In the camp of the reformers there was dissension. Ordinarily the women's clubs, the ministers, and the "god-goos," so called, are always with the reform ticket; in this case the impression created by Lem in those quarters was so excellent that they felt that he was a better candidate than Sturgis.

And Lem had already sent out the word that the candidacy of Sturgis was an effort upon the part of the corrupt corporations to defeat a man who would surely punish them—a charge to which the big interests handled by Mr. Sturgis lent some color.

One of Jack's most disappointing interviews was with his friend Jim Scott. He had called upon his former classmate in his imposing offices to line him up. Jim received him in his usual cordial fashion, offered cigars, gossiped about various things, and evaded the question as long as he could; but Jack finally pinned him down.

"You are with Sturgis, Jim, are you not?"

Jim wiggled uncomfortably, his face grew red, and he evaded looking his chum in the eye.

"I'm afraid not, old man."

"I appreciate your position, with your stepmother on the stump for Toadsby, but surely a man of your importance in the city cannot afford to stand for a fellow like that in the district attorney's office."

"You know I don't like him," agreed Jim. "But, honest, old man, I can't oppose him."

"It's duty."

"I'm not so sure. Of course, my life wouldn't be worth living if I came out for

Sturgis. You know my stepmother's tongue, but there are other considerations that make it impractical."

"For Heaven's sake, what?"

"Well, I'll be frank with you. I have big interests; I'm up to my neck in public service corporations, contracting concerns, factories, and transportation. My business interests require that I be a winner. Furthermore, we business men know where we stand with Sam Stone. There is more danger to big business from wild-eyed irresponsible reformers than from a corrupt political boss.

"We know what we can have and how much it costs us. He delivers. I hate the system, but I can't change it. And of course Stone is responsible for Toadsby. No matter what he tells my stepmother, I know that Lem will jump when Sam pulls the string."

"I would have staked my life on you, Jim," groaned Flanders. "I never really believed this talk that big business was responsible for civic corruption. You would not take a dishonest dollar, but you'd give it, and that's just as bad."

"You are fresh from law school and still have your illusions," smiled Jim. "I must play the game according to the rules in force. Lem can't be beaten anyway, and you are just wasting your time."

"Lem is going to be beaten," asserted Jack. "I know it looks hopeless, but it's five weeks yet to election."

"I hope you knock the tar out of him, but I can't say so, publicly. I warn you, he is vindictive and he'll get even with you for your activity, when he takes office."

"I'll take the chance."

Jack left the office rather despondent despite his big words. How to beat a man who had all the important nominations, who was in a position to count the votes, and who had the vociferous support of the most influential talkers in town, with the silent adherence of the big corporations, was a problem greater than he could solve, at present.

However, Sturgis had some support. Thompson, whose dairy business had been so seriously injured by Lem, contributed liberally to the Sturgis campaign fund and

sent out some of their best men to assist in the opposition organization. Fales, and other concerns who had been attacked without reason, did the same. One or two ministers of importance adhered to the reform organization, a club of college girls to whom Sturgis's daughter belonged rallied to him, and a small group of politicians in Independence Hall broke away from the organization, charging that it had sold out to Sam Stone, and joined the Reformers.

All the newspapers were strong for Lem Toadsby and the betting five weeks before the election was ten to one on the People's Friend.

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNINVITED GUEST.

MARY TRAFFORD came to Dudley to do some shopping. As she emerged from the Bon Ton Department Store, she came face to face with Jack Flanders. The intrepid campaigner for Sturgis looked as though he hoped the earth would swallow him up, but Mary smiled at him in friendly fashion and said:

"How do you do, Mr. Flanders?"

"Why—er—fine. And you are looking wonderful."

The conversation languished. Mary rather liked the situation, because it was the first time that she had ever met anybody who was afraid of her. Mr. Toadsby always assumed an attitude of deep humility when talking to her, but he was never at a loss for words and she had a feeling that she did not inspire him with awe.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Oh, just to my office."

"Would you mind very much taking me to lunch? Aunt has some electioneering to do and I was in doubt whether to go home or lunch in town alone."

"It would be a privilege," declared Jack. "I was sort of afraid that you were angry because I couldn't come out for Toadsby."

"Aunt was furious," she smiled. "I feel sure you are doing what you believe the right thing."

"Shall we go to the hotel dining room?"

"That will be nice."

They walked along without speaking and in a few moments were seated opposite each other in a corner of the big dining room. To Jack this was a most wonderful occasion, and, best of all, she had suggested it. She could not be very angry with him.

"It's awful good of you, considering that we are on opposite sides, to consent to lunch with me," he ventured.

"I don't see why politics should cause animosity," she smiled. "Really, I don't know why people get so excited. And from what aunt says, there isn't any real opposition to Mr. Toadsby."

"I suppose you will be delighted, if he is elected."

"Naturally. He is an old friend, and it will be a wonderful thing for a poor young man to be elected to such a high office. Why don't you like Lem, Mr. Flanders?"

"It is merely that I consider Mr. Sturgis a better man for the position. My likes and dislikes have nothing to do with it."

"I heard Mr. Toadsby tell aunt that you have always disliked him since you were boys, that you looked down on him because your people were well-to-do, while his were poor shopkeepers."

"I hope I'm not a snob."

She looked at him searchingly. "I don't think you are. Aunt says if it wasn't for the work you and your partner are doing, there wouldn't be much of any opposition to Mr. Toadsby."

"There isn't much anyway," admitted Jack, grimly. "But why spoil our lunch by discussing politics? Let's talk about you. Did you think I was a dreadful fool the day I talked with you over the phone? I sort of got rattled and didn't know what I was saying."

"You were a bit incoherent, but I didn't mind. It was nice of you to invite me and I was sorry I had a previous engagement."

"Were you? Will you accompany me to the theater or a dance, sometime?"

"I'm afraid not until the election is over. My aunt feels very strongly because you are not with us."

"She doesn't vote in Dudley, anyway," protested Jack. "Why should she be so strongly interested?"

"She owns property here, and she is very

anxious because of the good Mr. Toadsby is going to do."

"Look here. Do you like him?"

"Why, of course. He's a very wonderful person."

Jack looked at her wide eyes and her air of sweetness and trust, and groaned. It was impossible to tell her what he thought of the man, and, after all, he had nothing tangible to tell. And while he was looking at the lovely girl, somebody came up to the table and stood over it. Jack looked up into the smirking face of Toadsby himself.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Trafford," he said. "And it's a pleasure to see Mr. Flanders, too. Why did you not let me know you were coming to town? Your aunt would have wished me to take care of you."

Jack thought Mary's face showed a trace of displeasure, but he might have been mistaken.

"I shouldn't think of troubling such a busy man. I met Mr. Flanders, who was kind enough to take me to lunch."

"You won't think me intruding if I join you?" asked Toadsby, with his usual air of depreciation. "I know you are a splendid escort, Mr. Flanders, but Mrs. Scott would wish me to be with her niece."

"If the lady doesn't object, I certainly have no right to do so," said Jack, as politely as he could.

Lem took this for an invitation and settled himself into a chair.

"It's an extravagance for me to lunch at a hotel, but I had to see a client here and I was pressed for time," he explained.

"You are my guest since you are at my table," said Jack, disgustedly.

"Oh, I insist upon paying my own check."

Jack waved his hand with authority and thrust the bill of fare into his hand.

"When you are district attorney, you can afford to eat here regularly," he said with satire, which Mary observed, but which seemed lost on Lemuel.

"I'm sorry you have joined the opposition, Mr. Flanders," said the politician. "I agree with you heartily that I am not fit to be district attorney. I was thrust forward against my wishes, and only my re-

spect for the women's clubs caused me to consent. I am sure that Mr. Sturgis would conduct the office much better and, if I had my way, I would resign in his favor."

"Why don't you do it, then?" growled Jack. "What's to stop you?"

"The wishes of the good people who believe I should take the office."

Jack saw that Mary was taking Lem's protests in good faith, and as another instance of his modesty and fine character. That he should be compelled to sit at table with the fellow was most unpleasant and if he had not been Mary's host, he would have walked away. What would the reformers, who might be in the dining room, think to see him dining with the Sam Stone candidate? Lem continued to talk.

"I regret that you cannot support me, because I had you in mind for one of the assistant district attorneys. A young man of your character would be a great force for good in the office."

"How fine of you, Lem," said Mary, with shining eyes. "Surely, Mr. Flanders, you can come over to our side. It would be wonderful if you were Mr. Toadsby's assistant."

The astuteness of the fellow provoked Jack's admiration. Here was a man, paying marked attentions to this girl, who had come upon her lunching with a possible rival. Instead of exhibiting signs of jealousy or dislike, he had joined them with the best will in the world and exhibited every evidence of kindly feeling toward the rival—the best way possible to increase the regard which the girl might possess for him. He had put Jack in the position of behaving in a surly fashion, and rejecting apparently well meant advances, which, Mary could not realize, were in the worst possible taste.

"I am afraid Sam Stone might not share your good opinion of me," was the best answer of which he could think at the moment.

"Mr. Stone has no control over my appointments," replied Lem. "I am under no obligations to him, and it was without any overture from me that he indorsed my candidacy."

"Please let us not talk politics," pleaded

Mary, who realized now that the two men were at sword's points. "What do you think of 'Anna Christie,' Mr. Flanders? Did you see the play?"

"I thought it was a very wonderful play."

"It was a very immoral play," said Lem, heavily. "When I am in office I shall see that such indecent dramas are not permitted in Dudley."

"We are to have play censorship, then?" said Jack.

"Really, Lem, you take a wrong view of such things," protested Mary.

"The best interests of the city demand that nothing shall be shown which exhibits vice and exonerates it."

"Vice should be kept under cover?" Jack insinuated.

"It should not be allowed to exist."

"Are you going to put Sam Stone in jail?"

"If I can find any evidence which proves that he should be in jail."

"Well, I'll bet you won't."

"It's time for me to go home," Mary declared. "I am much obliged to you for taking me to lunch, Mr. Flanders. And I hope that you and Mr. Toadsby will be good friends."

"I extend the right hand of friendship to Mr. Flanders with pleasure."

He did so with great ostentation and put Jack in a bad hole. If he were seen shaking hands with Toadsby, it would be all over town in a few hours and the Sturgis camp would suppose he had joined the enemy.

"Don't be absurd, Toadsby," he said, carelessly, but ignoring the outstretched paw. "We can't shake hands in the middle of a fight."

"As far as I am concerned, there is no fight."

"Well, I'm fighting you tooth and nail, and you know it perfectly well."

"If you smite me on the right cheek, I'll turn to you the other cheek, also."

"Oh, confound it, you are too good to be true."

"Good-by, Mr. Flanders," said Mary, whose eyes were flashing dangerously. "I don't think you show a very Christian spirit. Will you see me to a car, Mr. Toadsby?"

Poor Jack looked after them in distress. Toadsby had beaten him this time as badly as he had done upon the occasion of the damage suit. He had had a chance to become friends with Mary, and the wily rival had pushed him into a position where he had to lose his self-respect or her good will. Disconsolately, he left the dining room he had entered so happily.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PEOPLE'S FRIEND.

TOADSBY fired the opening gun of his campaign with a eulogy of his opponent. At least it sounded like that until you reached the end, when you discovered that he had succeeded in intimating much and insinuating more.

Mr. Sturgis, according to Lem, was a very wonderful lawyer, an honest, upright man, and one who was far more qualified, from a strictly legal sense, than himself for the office. He explained in detail how the family of Sturgis was one of the oldest and most honorable in the State, a family which had early acquired wealth and had been enabled to give the son a wonderful start in life. Mr. Sturgis had graduated from the finest school and college in the country. When he opened a law office, he had the advantage of influential friends and strong family support. During his career, he had been concerned with big interests, defended them, not only in Dudley but before the Supreme Court of the nation. No one could say a word against him, declared Lem, and he had no intention whatever of doing so.

"My father was a poor butcher, who died while I was still a youngster," he continued. "I grew up in the streets. The parents of aristocratic children would not let their youngsters play with me because I was always in rags. I worked in factories and stores as I grew older and studied law at night until I fell asleep from fatigue. All my knowledge of the law was obtained outside of schools. When I was admitted to the bar, I was without powerful friends and because of my own upbringing and my love for common folks, all my work has been among the poor people. Their interests

have always been my interest; I know them and work for them. They have honored me by sending me to the Legislature. They bring me their legal troubles and I do my best for them, usually without a fee, because they are too poor to pay for them.

"How can a man like me be expected to meet a great lawyer on even terms? It happens, however, that most of the duty of a district attorney is punishing lawbreakers, the great percentage of the cases charged against poor people, who unwittingly offend against the penal code. There are rarely great legal questions to be decided by the district attorney; he is the agent of the people—to see they are not imposed upon.

"The only reason I want to be district attorney is because I know the people and I love them. What chance has a poor man, who happens to have made a mistake, when he comes face to face with Mr. Sturgis, who doesn't know the problems of the poor? How can he sympathize when he does not understand? If he was running for attorney general of the United States, I would vote for him, but, as district attorney, I think I would do the people more good.

"Then you want to remember that he belongs to the ruling class, the people who own the street cars, the railroads, the light and gas companies, the great contractors, the big manufacturers. He is the attorney of some of these concerns. When it is a case of the people against predatory corporations, would you place your fate in the hands of a high-toned lawyer, or an honest, God-fearing young man, who sprang from your own ranks?"

In this speech there wasn't a charge which Sturgis could declare to be false.

Lem was one of themselves, Sturgis was an aristocrat. Lem understood their problems, he could be depended upon to go light in the case of poor men, wrongly accused; his great human sympathy would enable him to stretch the letter of the law, while Sturgis, the inhuman, cold, aloof thinking-machine, would yield not a jot. There were thousands of votes in Lem's speech, if he needed them. It didn't look as though he did.

Sturgis issued a reply to the newspapers, which was an excellent argument by a man,

who had no arguments that could be publicly made.

He called attention to the fact that Lem's record in the Legislature was destructive, rather than constructive. He had attacked, without reason, several food concerns and had been forced to apologize for his false charges. He had never tried an important law case, his knowledge of the law was fragmentary and his arguments always an appeal to mob thought.

The very fact that he carried the endorsement of Liberty Hall was an indication that he was a satisfactory candidate to Sam Stone, and a man, who would satisfy the boss, would have to be as pliant and subservient as the present incumbent of the office.

Sturgis charged that the putting forward of Toadsby by the Women's Club was a plant by Sam Stone to have a candidate forced upon him, whom he had already selected. Unfortunately, he had no evidence to back up his charges, he was compelled to put himself in the ungrateful position of attacking a man who had spoken well of him, and he drew down denials from all quarters of his intimations of an understanding between the boss and Mrs. Scott's partisans.

Jack Flanders read the reply of Mr. Sturgis with a sinking heart. He had learned enough about politics to realize that it would have been better if the big lawyer had ignored Lem's statement.

"Unless we pin the goods on Lem in such a manner that his guilt is unmistakable," he told his partner, "we haven't got a ghost of a chance of beating him. Sturgis could not have said more than he did because we haven't a thing to go upon. A fine campaign we are going to wage with nothing to shoot at the enemy."

Sam Stone, two days later, made a crafty move, which strengthened Lem's hand.

"So far as selecting Lem Toadsby for the nomination by Liberty Hall," said the boss to reporters whom he had summoned, "I don't like the fellow. I was fool enough to agree to accept the nomination of the best man put forward by the so-called reform element. I would prefer Sturgis, because he is a man of business, while Toads-

by is a demagogue, but I realized that Toadsby would pull more votes, that he would get the Independence Hall nomination and we should be relieved of a contest. The great majority of the reformers were for Toadsby, and since I had voluntarily offered to give up the district attorney's office, I had to stick to my agreement."

The statement carried a lot of weight and, in many places, the impression was created that Stone was secretly with Sturgis.

Sturgis knew he had a bad case; he put it lawyer fashion; he must attack the personality of Lem Toadsby, or he had no apology for making a contest. In a chat with Jack Flanders, Fred Everett and Clapp, he said:

"We've got to go over the career of Toadsby from the beginning. He must have made enemies when he was beginning in politics. The interests of the county require that he be shown up and I am having his record investigated. I have already ascertained that Toadsby's record for getting petty criminals released without trial by Baker, Stone's district attorney, is very remarkable.

"In three years, he has had forty cases nol-prossed; that's three times as many as any lawyer of his type has managed to secure and it indicates, beyond a doubt, that he had influence with Baker; ties him up to Stone.

"Now I am trying to discover exactly what damages he recovered from corporations for his various clients during the past five or six years, and what proportion of the receipts went to the clients. We've already found a poor widow, whose husband was killed in a street car accident. Lem got a verdict of \$5,000 and turned over to her \$1,500. He explained that the balance was spent in necessary legal expenses and fixing certain people. The poor clients have no means of knowing that such charges are not proper; very likely they think he bribed juries and judges. If we can get a score of cases like this, it will punch a hole in his stock argument: that he handles cases for the poor free of charge."

"Another thing about Toadsby," said Fred Everett. "For a man who masquerades as a paragon of virtue, he has a tough

crowd, which swears by him in the Third Ward. Furthermore, he drinks; I have found a man who helped put him to bed a couple of years ago after one of his food investigations."

"That's no crime," said Sturgis.

"Well, how about his friendship with Martin Jeffords, the prize fighter, who almost killed a man in a drunken brawl three years ago and whom Lem saved from four or five years in jail by getting his case nol-prossed."

"Gratitude," said Sturgis. "You can't get votes by proving that Lem associates with the kind of people who compose a large proportion of the electorate. If he is friendly with Jeffords, it's an evidence of his democracy."

"About everything we turn up seems to help instead of hinder him," Jack Flanders sighed. "I'm going to move down into the Third Ward and see what I can uncover personally. There must be some people down there who were injured by him when he was scrambling for a start in politics."

"That isn't a bad idea," approved the leader. "You are not back in Dudley long enough to be well known. Take a room in a boarding house, buy some hand-me-down clothes and drift around among the cheap cafés and hangouts for a week or so. There is evidence enough to hang Toadsby somewhere, if we can get our hands on it."

"You are taking a chance, Jack," warned his partner. "Lem knows you, and one of his thugs might murder you if he thought you were trying to get something on the fellow."

"If we don't take chances, we're done. I crave action of some kind."

"Then I'll go with you."

"No. One man can make acquaintances; two men drive others away."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIND OF A MAID.

WHEN Lem Toadsby led Mary away from the luncheon party he was exceedingly careful not to chide her for being on friendly terms with one of his most active opponents. He felt that

he had handled Jack Flanders very skillfully, and he was shrewd enough to know that he must not assume any authority over Mary until she yielded it to him voluntarily.

"I hope Mrs. Scott will not find out that you were lunching with Flanders," he remarked. "She is a very strict partisan, and she is quite bitter against Mr. Flanders. Personally I don't blame the fellow for fighting me. Lawyers think that a public legal official should have extraordinary special qualifications, and the college and law-school men have a very poor opinion of chaps who have to learn their business by night study. They don't think we know anything."

"Ridiculous!" flashed Mary. "Abraham Lincoln never went to school or college, but he beat the marvelous Stephen A. Douglas, who had every advantage."

"It's absurd comparing me to Lincoln. We were both homely, but he was a great man."

"And you are going to be; my aunt is sure of it. I am very angry with Mr. Flanders for refusing to shake hands with you."

"I suppose he thought he might soil his hand by touching my toil-hardened palm," he said, looking ruefully at his hairy paw.

If pity is akin to love, it is certain that Mary pitied Lem Toadsby at that moment; perhaps she was near loving him. It flattered her a bit to have a man whose name was in everybody's mouth so meek and humble, so appealing when he was with her.

He seemed so friendless, so pathetic, so ill-equipped for the struggle against the stalwart, clean-cut, self-confident folk like Sturgis and even Jack Flanders. Although Jack was always embarrassed in her presence and was obviously influenced by her girlish charm, it was impossible for her to pity him because, withal, he looked so extremely competent.

So she patted Lem on the arm encouragingly, listened to his ingenious explanations of political things which puzzled her, never dreamed of doubting any of his statements, and finally left him in a mood of exultation which he cleverly concealed.

She told her aunt upon her arrival home

of her meeting with Jack Flanders, listened quietly to the lady's tirade against the classmate of her stepson, then placated her by describing Lem's appearance, his generous offer to Jack, and her indignation at Jack's curt refusal of the olive branch.

"If Mr. Toadsby has one failing, it is his never-ending flow of human kindness," said Mrs. Scott. "This man Flanders is setting stories afoot about Lemuel; he is straining every nerve to defeat him; and Mr. Toadsby should have scorned to speak to him. He should have demanded that you quit the company of such a person at once. I am glad you were spirited enough to let him see that you disapproved of him."

"It's too bad," said Mary, whose resentment against Jack faded in the face of her aunt's bitterness against him. "He is really a nice boy, but very stubborn and misguided."

"Mary," said Mrs. Scott, "it's time you began to think of getting married. You are my only relative, and I have left you all my property in my will, as you know; some day you will be very rich. Then the fortune-hunters will come, and I tremble for you because you are so innocent and unsophisticated."

"I think it is providential that you have had the chance to know a man like Mr. Toadsby and realize his good qualities. I am sure he is in love with you, and only refrains from asking you to marry him because he is poor. He knows you will be rich because he drew my will."

"Would you wish me to marry Mr. Toadsby?" asked Mary, lifting her big brown eyes brimming with gratitude to her good aunt.

"Nothing would please me better. Some day he will be Governor and perhaps President, and you would have a wonderful career."

"I don't know," said Mary slowly. "I like him; he is so modest, and almost too timid. Somehow I can't seem to think of him as a husband. I know he is young, but he seems almost elderly, and I don't know whether I would like to have him kiss me or not."

"Rubbish! He is a fine, strong, upstanding young man. His early surroundings were

not calculated to give him polish, but I'm very democratic and I think a man deserves all the more credit for rising above them. I hope you are not the sort of girl who yearns for a caveman."

"Oh, no," said Mary. "They would be dreadful, too."

"Well, consider it, my dear. I don't want to force your decision, but I don't know of anybody so worthy of a girl like you."

Mrs. Scott hustled away. She always had a basket of mail to open, scores of letters to dictate. On her shoulders was the weight of the morals and the welfare of the world. Mrs. Scott was really a very good woman. Her temperament was nervous; she was left a widow with a large fortune and nothing to occupy her mind. Although she was not a brilliant woman, nor even a clever one, she had a fund of energy, a desire to be helpful, and she had grown, because of her material advantages and the flock of parasites they attracted, to be very sure of herself and unamenable to opposition or advice.

She had encountered Lem Toadsby upon her first excursion to the Legislature when she was lost in the traffic. He knew all about her—he made it his business to know everything—and the deference he showed her, his zeal for her success, his willingness to give her all of his time, and his violent partisanship of several half-baked measures which she wished to be passed by the Legislature had completely won her.

Lem became the official spokesman in the State House of the element she represented. Although not a single bill which she advocated ever became law, she heard him make earnest appeals for them before the House, and she heard him deliver encomiums upon her own personality to his fellow legislators which flattered her vanity to the bursting point.

Now she was quite ready to turn over her cherished niece with her blessings to a nondescript politician who had never been sincere since he first ran for office.

Poor little Mary had never read a book on sex; she knew none of the thrills of the girls who "neck" and "pet"; she was as yet unaware of the sympathetic current which draws a girl to a certain man and

rears itself like a dammed river against the touch of another. Lem was no romantic figure; he was as unwholesome as a reptile, but a snake has fascination, and his soft speech, his lack of self-assertion, had a certain attraction for her. Her belief in his goodness and her aunt's dominating personality had much weight with Mary.

It must be remembered that on this round earth of ours about ninety per cent of the young women are still mated to men whom they have no chance to know or love. Countless millions of girls, not only in Asia and Africa, but in civilized Europe, are led to the altar by men chosen by their parents with little consideration for the wishes of the maidens. To some extent in England and largely in the United States girls have attained a freedom of choice; but the training of all the ages has been that woman must submit.

It would have required only a dictum from her aunt to cause this half fascinated darling to extend her beautiful white hand to Lem Toadsby, the coming man. And while Mrs. Scott proclaimed that she had no wish to make her niece marry a man against her will, it was impossible for that matron to refrain from trying to bring about what she decided was for the best.

That Lem did not utilize the influence he possessed with Mrs. Scott to bring about an engagement at once was due to his conviction that Mary was ready to accept him at any time, and his political sagacity.

Many thousands of votes were coming to Lem because of his pose as a man of the people whose sympathies were all with them and whose wish was to serve them only. If the engagement of this tribune to the heiress of one of the wealthiest women in the State were announced before election, there would be many who would declare that Lem had deserted his class, had sold out his boasted democracy for a mess of pottage. While it did not seem possible that any opposition could cause his defeat, he believed that no man is elected until the votes are counted. So he temporized.

When Lem had spied Mary having lunch unchaperoned in the Grand Hotel with Jack Flanders, for whom his boyhood hatred, long forgotten, had revived when he met

him at the Scott home, and which was now a violent flame because of his activity in the interests of Sturgis, he had rushed to the table with the determination of snatching Mary away.

His cunning saved him from such an error. In all probability Mary would have resented his action; to see him angry for the first time might upset his carefully planted impression in her mind. Instead he had been his usual urbane and insinuating self; had the satisfaction of seeing Jack play into his hands, and had led off the girl at her request.

Lem's knowledge of women was not as great as his political acumen. Seeing that Mary was angry and resentful, he assumed that danger to his property from that quarter was over; otherwise, he would have commenced an intrigue immediately to make the engagement a settled thing.

It was not for him to know that women are only angry and indignant with men who interest them, for others they are either indifferent or contemptuous. In the next twenty-four hours Mary thought up several excuses for Jack Flanders, and the one which pleased her best was that his attitude toward Lem Toadsby was chiefly caused by his distaste for the statesman for intruding upon a tête-à-tête.

Jack pleased Mary. Without understanding why, she liked to be near him; liked to see his boyish smile; enjoyed the sound of his voice. When he had touched her elbow to escort her across the street she had experienced an agreeable sensation. Up to the present she had unconsciously avoided the touch of Lem Toadsby. Her mind informed her that she liked him, but there was nothing mental about her attitude toward Jack. "He is nice," is the way she described him to herself.

CHAPTER X.

JACK SUBMERGES HIMSELF.

JACK FLANDERS made his plans for his plunge into the old Third Ward at once and prepared to settle himself there that very night. As he had never happened to encounter Ralph Munroe, Toads-

by's go-between, and as he had learned that Munroe lived in a lodging house on Cedar Street in the Third Ward, he decided that the most useful thing for him to do was to get a room in the same house, if possible.

Munroe was sufficiently well off that he could have afforded a much better address than the Cedar Street lodging house. His share in the illegal operations of Stone and Toadsby would have enabled him to put up at the best hotel in town. Having political aspirations, wishing to be considered like Lem, just a plain, hard-working, poor young man, he preferred to keep a residence in a district which he hoped to represent either in the Legislature or the City Council. However, he occupied the best room in the house, the front parlor, which contained a piano, a bookcase, a fireplace, and a washstand, with running water, for which luxury he paid fifteen dollars per week.

Other lodgers were chauffeurs, carpenters, clerks, and a working girl or two—people not likely to be interested in the private affairs of the young lawyer.

As Jack Flanders strolled down Cedar Street he observed, pasted on the brick wall of the house beside the front door, a small square of paper on which was printed in ink: "Rooms to Let."

He had not hoped for such luck, and he hastened up the steps and rang the bell. It was opened by a fat, slovenly woman of forty-five, whose fading complexion was pathetically painted in a way to deceive nobody, and whose thin blond hair was pulled back from her face and fastened in a knot at the back.

Her look was blank and dispirited. To see her now it would be hard to believe that twenty years ago she had danced and sung in musical comedy.

Ten years of running a lodging house had ruined her figure, coarsened her hands, soured her disposition, and she had long since ceased to inform her guests of her histrionic past. Her name was Mrs. Hannah Graham.

"Yeh, I got a room," said Mrs. Graham. "Guess it's more'n you want to pay," she said, with a swift appraisal of his worn suit, his soft collar, and shabby hat and shoes.

Had she known that there was no price

he would not pay for a room in her house she would have asked much more than the twelve dollars per week which she demanded for her back parlor. When Jack learned that she was offering him the room next to Munroe's he concealed his satisfaction with difficulty, and when he saw that it was separated from that of the star lodger only by a pair of folding doors it seemed to him that the gods were fighting on his side.

"Who's got the front room? No children, I hope," he remarked.

"None. Very fine young man named Munroe; pays his rent on the dot, very quiet, often isn't here for days at a time. Wish all my tenants was like him."

"I'll take this room. My trunk will be here to-morrow," said Jack. "I'll pay you in advance if you like."

"'S my rule," she said. "When you have to run a lodging house in a district like this you got to make them pay in advance and never let a day go by, or you'll be stuck good. What's your name?"

"John Farlow," he said, giving a name agreed upon by himself and Fred Everett.

"What's your business?"

"I'm an insurance agent."

"Well, I've got all the insurance I want; the house is insured, and I can't have you annoying the other lodgers."

"I won't," laughed Jack. "I don't do business outside working hours."

When she left him he sat down in a decrepit rocker and regarded his bargain. It was an appalling room, a depressing, dismal room. Undoubtedly many of the lodging house suicides are due to the character of lodging house rooms; the poor victims come to believe that nothing beyond the Jordan could be quite so dreadful as the place they call home.

Jack's room was papered in light brown with a horrible triangular figure in it which repeated itself so often that you could not get away from it. The dark stains here and there where water had leaked in, or dirt of some sort had fastened on the paper, were a positive relief. The landlady had decorated the room with colored prints of dead United States Presidents, prints which had been given away with Sunday newspapers. There was one of McKinley, of

Roosevelt, and of Harding. In time, doubtless, Coolidge would find a place on these walls. Such are the rewards of fame.

That Lincoln and Washington were not present was due to the fact that newspapers did not present colored prints in their time. The only contrast to these grim great ones was a little framed colored picture of a baby in great distress because four puppies had overturned his milk bottle, and while one of these was lapping up the spilled milk the other three were playfully eating his little shirt.

The bed was an antique black walnut with a mattress which was more ancient than the bed, judging by the way it felt when he gingerly pressed upon it with his hand. There was a decaying old marble-topped bureau of painted pine, containing a mirror which threw such a ghastly reflection as to cause the occupant of the room to feel he might as well be dead as the way he looked.

However, these things mattered very little to Jack Flanders. He looked for the key-hole in the folding doors, but found that it was blocked in some manner. However, there was a crack where the doors met; too narrow for sight, but he fancied that a man with his ear to it might hear something of any conversation which took place on the other side.

While he did not know Munroe, it was possible that his own face was familiar to the friend of Toadsby; it would be necessary to keep out of his sight. This should be fairly easy, as he did not believe that Munroe tried to mix with the inhabitants of this mean lodging house.

It was then about nine o'clock. By turning out his light he was able to observe that the front room was also unlighted. No use hanging around, since Munroe was not at home.

Jack put on his hat and left the place. The landlady had already presented him with his keys and received her first week's rent in advance.

For a couple of hours he wandered around the streets of the Third Ward. It was a region of cheap, miserable little stores, bakers, grocers, butchers, barbers, haberdashers, fruit sellers, dirty drug stores.

In the old days a saloon on every corner had brightened up the neighborhood. People who had to live in such places were able to loaf in the saloons, gossip, tell stories, consume cheap drinks, emerge at eleven o'clock in a cheerful if liquored condition, which made the bedraggled district less depressing and their musty holes of furnished rooms more endurable. Jack supposed that he might have made friends quickly leaning against various bars, and would have overheard conversations which would have helped him. But what has become of the "poor man's club"?

He saw a Gospel Mission, almost empty, a few hangers-on in drug stores, possibly speak-easies, small groups chatting in desultory fashion on corners, a thin circle around a Salvation Army meeting. On the front steps of many houses sat some of the inmates, for the weather was still warm enough to sit outdoors. In a small park were a score of benches occupied almost entirely by tramps. So far as locating a place where he could rub elbows with many men in confidential mood, there seemed nothing at all.

The police had cleaned up the Third Ward so far as little liquor-selling cafés were concerned; Jack did not see a single place of this sort, nor did he encounter a drunken man in two hours of rambling. Vice and sin had vanished from the streets, at least, and whither they had fled themselves was a mystery to him. The Prohibitionists could congratulate themselves that they had turned the Third Ward from a roaring, garish, booze-guzzling sink hole of iniquity into a quiet, orderly neighborhood of dreary sobriety.

It seemed to Jack that society should provide something to take the place of the hospitality of the saloon in such districts. The inhabitants could not afford clubs, they probably resented places where they were allowed to sit on condition that they submit to religious preachings. The profits of the saloons had enabled the owners to offer heat, bright lights and free lunch. Those who had eliminated such things should be forced to provide a substitute.

So, without making a single acquaintance, or learning a thing of the slightest value in

connection with his mission, he finally turned into Cedar Street and narrowly escaped bumping into Lem Toadsby, who came around the corner in company with another man.

Jack slipped into a doorway and they passed him without paying him any attention. He let them have a lead of a couple of hundred feet and followed them. They turned up the steps of his own lodging house; Lem's companion must be Munroe.

He waited until he saw a light on the curtain of the front parlor, then let himself into the front hall, opened his own door noiselessly, entered, and stood in the center of his room, in the dark.

Light was streaming through the crack in the folding door. Then he noticed that an obliging rat had eaten away the bottom of one of the doors so that a triangle of light, about half an inch at the base, came through just above the floor.

Jack lay down on the floor and, by pressing his cheek against the mouldy carpet, he found he could see into the front room. Also he could hear very plainly. And the conversation was intensely interesting.

Munroe had brought out a bottle and two glasses. The strictly tee-total Lem had poured himself an inch of red liquor and added some water. His friend did likewise.

"Who lives back there?" Lem said in a low voice, but one which was distinctly audible.

"It's all right. The back room has been vacant for a week."

"Fine," said Lem in his ordinary tones. "Now, what's the report?"

"This was the toughest proposition yet. I went to John J. Loomis, as you said Mr. Stone wanted me to. I never met him and he hadn't ever heard of me. When he came into his library, he said: 'I don't know who you are or what you want, but if it's business, you'll find me daily at the Wilson Biscuit Company.'

"'It's business,' I said, 'but not the sort you can talk at the office. Do you want to put the Bently Cracker Company out of business? I happen to know they are cutting into you heavily.'

"'A business man always wants to beat a competitor,' he answered, cagily. 'We

would pay liberally to get their trade, but, of course, we should not do anything that wasn't honorable.'

"'All's fair in war and business,' I told him, with a laugh.

"'What's your proposition?' he said, curtly.

"'You know what happened to the Thompson Dairy Goods outfit?'

"'Legislative investigation?'

"'Yes, but this time with the goods.'

"'And who's to conduct such an investigation?'

"'You know who did it before.'

"'Toadsby, but he's going to be district attorney.'

"'He doesn't take office until January first. Time for one more investigation.'

"Then what does John J. Loomis do but draw himself up, puff out his cheeks and demand to know what I take him for. Have you ever seen him? He's a short, fat man, with gray side whiskers and a large, round, pale face. Say, he got pink with indignation, and told me to get out of his house, so I went."

"The damned old hypocrite!" exclaimed Toadsby.

"Listen. That was two days ago. Today I got a ring on the phone.

"'Mr. Munroe,' says a voice. 'You called on a gentleman at his home on a matter of business two days ago. Will you be in the alley at the rear of the Exchange Building in half an hour?'

"'I don't know you,' I said.

"'I know you. I'll introduce myself.'

"I reached the place and I had been standing there less than a minute when a well-dressed, smart-looking young fellow comes up to me and called me by name.

"'I am Burton Whitefield,' he said. 'Will you come to lunch with me. I've got something very important to take up with you.'

"I didn't know what to make of it until we were sitting in a booth in a quiet little café. He ordered two lunches, then sat back, grinned at me, and said: 'I'm assistant secretary of the Wilson Biscuit Company.'

"'How do you do,' I chuckled. It was too funny.

"President Loomis has come to the conclusion that we should increase our business, and, having confidence in me, he has given me a campaign fund to use as I see fit."

"He told me that all he wanted was results and he wasn't interested to know how I got them, in fact, he didn't want to know. But he told me that you were a young man with ideas, that I should get in touch with you and arrange a plan of campaign."

"What a crafty old cootie Loomis is," commented Toadsby. "If things go wrong, there isn't going to be any way to reach him. Whitefield goes to jail."

"If I can increase our business," says Whitefield, "I will be made secretary of the company when Tarbell goes out next year."

"Is your campaign fund about \$20,000?" I asked him.

"Yes, if necessary."

"Well, you retain me for \$5,000 cash down. Then go back to your office and leave the rest to me. You will give me an agreement that the Wilson Cracker Company will pay me an advisory fee of \$15,000 more when your business increases. You agree to show me your books if necessary."

"Why, that's all right," he says. "Of course, no mention of the Bently Cracker Company in the agreement."

"Do you think I'm crazy?"

"So he writes out the agreement and signs it. I give him a receipt for the \$5,000 as retaining fee, and now it's up to you, Lem."

"Come across with the five thousand," ordered Toadsby.

"Now, look here, Lem. I've done all this work. This will be the last investigation, and then I'm out in the cold. I ought to get more than ten per cent."

"Haven't I got to give half to Sam Stone?"

"How do I know that?"

"Besides, there are other expenses in this case. With my campaign for district attorney, I can't have another investigation blow up. This one will put Bently out of business."

"How you going to get the goods on him?" demanded Munroe.

"That's my business. Here's five hundred dollars. Now shut up!"

Jack, lying flat on the floor with his ear glued to the crevice, heard Lem push back his chair and make preparations for departure. Munroe also rose.

"Don't come with me," said Lem. "We can't afford to be seen together under the circumstances. If you want to go out, wait five minutes."

Jack heard the door slam and afterward the crash of the closing front door.

He heard Munroe grumbling aloud. Then came the tinkle of bottle against glass after which the liquor was hidden and the go-between put on his own hat and hied himself hence. Then Jack got up and groped around for a chair. His head was going around with excitement. The very first night of his rather blind excursion into the Third Ward he had overheard the details of a conspiracy which should put Lem and Munroe behind the bars.

Of course he could not convict them on what he had heard. Several witnesses and a stenographic report of the conversation would do the trick. Unfortunately, it was his unsupported word against that of the two men.

The boldness of the conspirators took his breath away. On the eve of his election, with the support of the best as well as the worst element in the town, Lem was audacious enough to plan another one of his nefarious attacks upon a reputable business concern, and had secured the heavy financial backing of its chief competitor.

As usual, their methods were exceedingly ingenious. Loomis did not know Toadsby. He had refused to have anything to do with his go-between. He had given a young man in his employ an order to increase sales and allotted a sum of money ostensibly for advertising and promotion. Even the assistant secretary had made no deal to injure Bently. He had hired an "idea man," Munroe, paid him a retainer and agreed to pay him more if business warranted it.

Jack knew that the Wilson Biscuit Company had kept its skirts clear. As far as Munroe was concerned, he had no connection with Toadsby or with any legislator. He did not lift a finger to bring about an investigation into the product of the Bently Company. Unless he could be caught in

the act of passing money to Toadsby and be made to confess the source from which the money came, there was no way of proving conspiracy.

However, Jack was in possession of very valuable information. If the Sturgis campaign committee could not find a way to save the unfortunate Bently Company and to expose the hypocritical candidate for district attorney, then it would be very strange.

Lest he awaken suspicion of being other than he pretended, he slept in his room that night, and slept badly. Munroe did not return at all so far as he knew and he was awake most of the night.

In the morning, he hastened to the office of the Reform candidate and told his sensational tale. Sturgis immediately called a conference of five of the best lawyers who were supporting him and laid the situation before them.

When Jack had told the astonished committee the details of the conspiracy as he had overheard it, there was a second of stunned silence, then an outburst of indignation, but Sturgis took the floor.

"It happens, gentlemen, that I am attorney for the Bently Cracker Company, which is to be the victim of this plot. No plan which might sacrifice my client for the benefit of my campaign will have my sanction. We know the mischief Toadsby's unjustifiable charges, and the investigations which followed, wrought to the Thompson people, to Fales, and other concerns. They are staggering under the weight of public distrust to this day.

"Apparently, Toadsby plans to substantiate his charges in the case of the Bently Company in some manner, and if he succeeds, he will put them completely out of business. It's our duty to save Bently's before we consider how we can turn this information to use in defeating Toadsby for district attorney. Have you any plan, Mr. Flanders?"

"The only thing I can think of is to put the screws on Munroe, and make him confess."

"Even that would not be enough. He gives Toadsby cash and gets no receipts. It would be his word against Lem's and,

with an election coming on, it would be generally believed that Munroe had been bribed by us to discredit the opposition.

"I thought I might conceal another witness and a stenographer in my room in case they had another conference."

"How about putting a dictaphone in Munroe's room?" suggested Clapp.

"If I got a locksmith to pick the lock so that I could get into his room from mine, and somebody showed me how to install and operate a dictaphone, that could be done."

"How about a flashlight photograph, showing Munroe giving Toadsby money?" proposed Rufus Gray.

Sturgis laughed shortly. "It's unlikely that any more money will be passed until after the investigation, in which case, Bently will be ruined. And the difficulties in introducing a photographer into the room are insurmountable."

"How about notifying Loomis that the scheme is discovered?" asked Fred Everett. "He is apparently a cowardly old scoundrel; if he thinks anybody has an inkling of what is going on, he will probably call the whole thing off immediately."

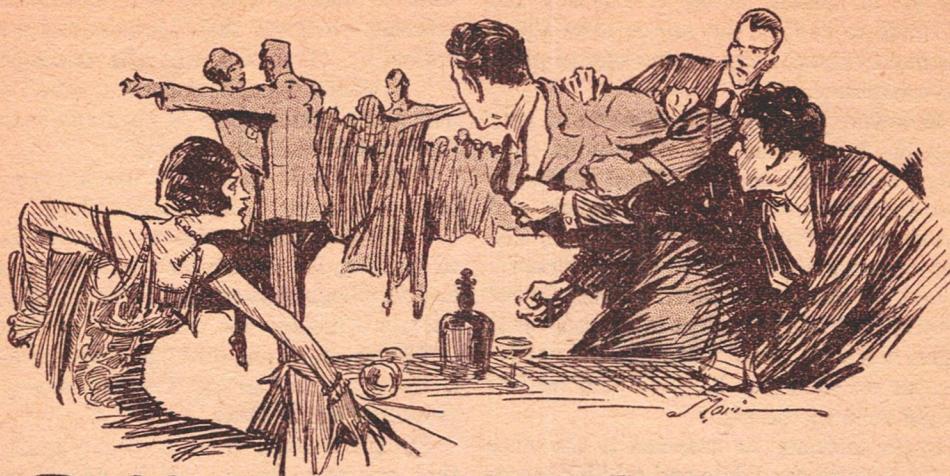
"In which case, we have no chance of nabbing Toadsby with his fingers in this pie," Jack protested.

"Mr. Everett's suggestion is a good one," judged Sturgis. "But it will work just as well on the eve of the attack on Bently as any time."

"In the meantime, let us try to get these fellows with the goods. How do you suppose they plan to prove that Bently sells impure or defective crackers?"

There were a few guesses, but none that seemed very probable. Sturgis finally asked permission to call in Bently, warn him, and ask him what an enemy might do to injure his business. Jack was warmly thanked for his admirable detective work and asked to stay on the job for a few days.

Accordingly, he camped out in Mrs. Graham's lodging house for three days longer without seeing Munroe or hearing anything further from the front room. So far as he knew the lawyer had not visited the place. Little did he realize what was to befall him in that first floor front.



The Other Fellow

By **FRED JACKSON**

Author of "Peridoux," "The Jack of Diamonds," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

HE bent over the suit case that lay open on the satin-quilted bed, and appraised the contents with eager, intent, dark eyes. Pyjamas—her best pair, soft apricot silk, heavily embroidered in jade green; yellow satin slippers; chiffon handkerchiefs; her gold toilet set; a negligee, white, trimmed with bands of white fox; her jewelry.

Not a very extensive wardrobe, but enough for overnight—enough for immediate emergencies. Time enough to get the rest of her things after she had been forgiven. Afterward—

She shook back her thick, wavy, bobbed hair, and smiled suddenly into space. *Afterward*—such a lot lay in that simple word. It meant her dreams coming true. A new life, completely different from her life up to now; an absolute break with her childhood and girlhood years. Love—responsibility—*Tommy*.

She sighed ecstatically and relinquished

her day dreams with a little toss of her head; continued the survey of her bag. Better take something to wear to-morrow; slippers and stockings; a street dress of some sort, or suit; a hat.

Heavens, what a lot to stuff into one little bag!

There came a knock on the door. Swiftly the bag went under the bed, and Constance Trent dropped into the low chair before her dressing table and began polishing her nails with amazing concentration.

"Come," she called softly, and began to hum an innocent little tune with the most guileless expression in the world.

Her mother appeared in the doorway—a very grand lady indeed, dignified, quietly compelling in manner, obviously the acknowledged head of her perfectly run household.

"Elise tells me you are going out this evening, Constance?" she said inquiringly as she rustled in.

"Yes—to dinner at the Thayers'; dancing afterward," answered Constance casually.

She glanced up, wide eyed. She always looked straight at you with wide-open, innocent eyes when she lied.

"Oh, the Thayers'," repeated her mother with relief.

"It's to be quite a big party, Judy said, so I'll probably be very late coming home," Constance ran on, perfecting the Cupid's bow of her mouth with a tiny crimson lipstick.

Her mother nodded.

"So long as I know it's the Thayers'," she remarked. And then: "No doubt you think I was very hard and cold and uncomprehending this afternoon—about this Readman boy. But if you will just trust my judgment a little more—I am older and more experienced, after all, and perhaps a better judge of human nature. And you are spoiled, of course, overimpulsive."

She had ruled so long that it never occurred to her that Constance was growing up, with a good deal of her own spirit in her, and must eventually contest her authority.

So she gazed rather wistfully now at the small, impudent, fascinating face, and added:

"Do try to get interested in somebody else, won't you? It isn't only that Tommy Readman *has* nothing. I can't feel that he'll ever *amount* to anything. And I can't stand by and see you throw yourself away."

Constance glanced across to make sure that her suit case was safely hidden, and answered:

"Tommy's certain not to be at the Thayers', so you needn't worry to-night at any rate."

Her mother sighed.

"Yes—that is something. I see that nothing I can say can influence you. You seem to be growing beyond me these days. I don't understand it. I can only hope that time will reveal to you what I cannot."

Her maid came in and began "picking up" after her. There was always considerable picking up to be done when Constance finished dressing. She had a way

of just stepping out of things and leaving them. Now, in her tasks, Elise came perilously near the bed, and stooped—and Constance's heart stood still for one paralyzing instant. But the maid failed to see the bag.

So much depends on these little things. If Elise *had* seen the bag, the rest of Constance's life from that moment would have run a totally different course. But no doubt there is fate in it all.

Elise did not see the bag. Mrs. Trent rustled out, undisturbed by any premonitions or forewarnings, and Constance rose from her dressing table to slip into the soft chinchilla coat her maid was holding.

"All right, Elise. Tell Jermyn, please," said Constance.

Elise hurried down to summon the car. Constance rushed to the bed, pulled out the suit case, fastened it; rushed to the window and very carefully dropped it out into the bushes below.

Downstairs she stopped into the dining room long enough to kiss her father good night. She had always kissed her father, seldom her mother. She had a strange feeling of sympathy and affection for her father. He was a jovial little man, rather irresponsible and boyish. When Constance had been a child her father had always romped with her. She still saw things from his point of view, too, rather than from her mother's.

Now he pinched her cheek and told her to have a good time and not break too many hearts. He was proud of her slim, cool youth, as she stood over him, swathed in white and crystal, fresh, fragrant, vibrant with promise.

Constance told Elise not to bother waiting up, and slipped out of the great door the butler was holding open for her.

She had a queer, sinking feeling as the door closed behind her with a kind of dull thud, but she fought it down. Mere nerves, she told herself scoffingly.

The chauffeur was busy looking into the engine of the car; he had the lid up and was absorbed. Constance slipped down the steps, found her bag, apparently undamaged by its fall, and carried it to the machine.

"All right, Jermyn," she called as he hurriedly advanced to the door. "I'm going to the Biltmore."

He looked vaguely surprised as he heard the directions, and she saw his eyes rest just an instant on the bag. But he saluted obediently enough, mounted the box and they started.

II.

LIFE is a maze of twisting paths down which we wander, never seeing more than a foot or two ahead, never knowing what other paths will cross the one we are treading, unaware of the direction we are taking and of our eventual destination.

Before morning Constance was destined to meet Jack Wayne under strange and harrowing circumstances, but as yet—although only a few short hours intervened until midnight and they were within two blocks of each other—neither even knew that the other existed.

As Constance leaned back in the motor, gazing dreamily out of the window, the car went down Sixth Street past the big corner house in which Jack Wayne was impatiently tying his tie.

It was his father who knocked at his door.

"Come in," he yelled ferociously in a tone that dared any one to intrude upon his privacy. But the look of annoyance at being disturbed in the midst of such a critical operation disappeared as he observed that it was his father who entered.

"Oh, hello, dad—didn't know you were home yet. What time is it, for gosh sake?" cried Jack.

"Not quite seven. I came a little earlier, hoping to catch sight of you."

The elder Wayne sat down rather heavily, observing his son with somewhat troubled eyes. Jack cast a swift, uneasy look at his father and began once more to apply himself to the business of adjusting his tie.

"Anything special?" he asked casually.

"Yes," answered his father. "There's been a good deal of talk lately about you and a girl at one of the roadhouses."

Jack turned his blue eyes on his father and laughed. There was an amazing charm

about him some way. Even his father felt it—felt his uneasiness melting under the boy's frank, winning smile.

"Don't worry about that," he cried. "We're just pals—buddies! Nothing serious in it at all, dad. I'm not thinking of settling down yet."

"I wonder when you will begin to think about it, Jack?" rejoined his father wearily. "You're twenty-four. I was branch manager of the Wheelock Company when I was twenty-four. But you—you come in three or four nights a week drunk! You go about raising hell generally with a lot of no-account wasters and women that are no better than they should be! And at the office you just go through the motions of attending to business. Your mind's not on your work, and how can it be when you're up night after night, drinking and carousing? I tell you, I get pretty worried sometimes, wondering what would become of you if I died now!"

Jack was regarding his reflection in the mirror with knitted brows; he put on his waistcoat carefully and fastened it, without answering; then he put on his coat, surveyed himself critically, came and patted his father's shoulder encouragingly.

"Don't you worry, dad," he said. "I'm going to surprise you some day. You'll see."

His father looked up at the six feet of sturdy manhood before him, and a feeling of pride battled in him with his feeling of perturbation.

"That will be the happiest day of my life," he said.

Jack stopped long enough in the dining room to fill his silver pocket flask at the buffet. He didn't even know the meaning of the word prohibition. He stopped again in the hallway to kiss his mother, who was just coming down to dinner. He had always kissed his mother on going out and coming in. There was a close bond between them. She understood him better than his father did; he was more like her.

His snappy little roadster, a high-powered car that could go like blazes, was waiting in the driveway, its nose among the rosebushes. He stepped into it and sped away.

Meanwhile, at the Biltmore, Tommy Readman was waiting in feverish expectancy for Constance to arrive. He was a dark boy with the picturesque features that women adore. Men saw through him easily. But as he stood there on the steps, looking now at his watch and again at the driveway through which her car must come, he was an attractive figure with a kind of devil-may-care air about him.

A rather suave-looking older man came out of the hotel, recognized him, and approached.

"Hello, Readman. I've been wanting a few words with you," he said.

Tommy turned with a slight frown of annoyance.

"Oh, Darcy," he murmured. "Don't bother me now, will you, old chap. I know what you want, and I'll get in touch with you in a few days."

"You said that before. And it was a gambling debt—a debt of honor," said Darcy. "It should have been paid at once."

"I know. I meant to pay up, but I've been broke and awfully hard pressed," said Tommy. "I've been through a hell of a siege, old man. But I begin to see daylight now. I have a heavy date to-night, and if things turn out as I expect I'll be fixed right from now on."

"All right," said Darcy. "Sounds like another stall, but I'll give you this last chance. Only remember—if you *don't* make good, I'll collect, with interest!" And he moved off as Constance's car drove up.

Tommy hurried forward to meet her, and she stepped out, giving him her bag. Darcy, looking on from a little distance, whistled appreciatively as he recognized her. The Trents were well known in Los Angeles, where their fortune had been made.

Tommy took the bag, gazing down at Constance with happy, relieved, contented eyes, and they moved toward his car, which was waiting below.

"Where are we going now?" she asked breathlessly.

"To the minister's," answered Tommy emphatically. "Can't risk any slip up."

"Oh!" she gasped, her heart beating wildly.

3 A

"Excited?" asked Tommy, smiling down at her.

"Yes—and a little frightened," gasped Constance.

"Nerves," he assured her calmly. "You will feel a lot better after it's over and you've had something to eat."

She laughed at that, and his spirits rose. She *was* lovely; she would have been worth any man's while even without her money, he told himself. He was in luck. The car kept throbbing that out to him all the way to the minister's house. In luck, in luck, in luck! But to Constance it sang—in love, in love, in love!

The minister was waiting—Tommy had seen to that—and he had provided witnesses. Constance was weak with terror when the moment actually came; but she was game, and she went through, with the frightened eyes of a deer and a face pale beneath her rouge.

The ceremony took an eternity—much, much longer than she had supposed it would—and it seemed much more solemn and serious, somehow, dreadfully solemn and serious. She was in a panic before it ended, but she managed to make the proper responses and smile at Tommy as he took her in his arms at the end.

Mrs. Tommy Readman!

It was done. So simply. The whole course of her life altered with her name—a future linked with his—his people instead of hers from now on—his friends, his interests, his life.

They drove back to the Biltmore to dine in state. They reached their table just as Jack Wayne reached *his* table at the Plantation.

III.

IN the new Spanish house which the Trents had built along old Spanish lines the Trents were still at dinner. An air of serenity reigned over the scene. Soft-footed, the Filipino butler moved about; candlelight warmed the yellow plaster walls; outside in the patio, among almost impossibly gorgeous flowering plants, a fountain played softly.

The ringing of the telephone interrupted the tranquil scene, and after answering the

call from the den the Filipino boy entered to announce:

"Miss Thayer wants to know what is detaining Miss Constance. She say they are waiting dinner for her."

"What's that? She hasn't arrived yet?" cried Mrs. Trent in surprise. And, unhooking the attachment that hung under the table just at her hand, she said into it: "Hello, Judy. Do you mean to say Constance hasn't got there yet?"

"Why, no," answered Judy Thayer. "Has it been long since she started?"

"Yes—quite some time. Something must have gone wrong with the car. You had better begin dinner, though I dare say she will turn up now at any minute. I'm awfully sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," responded Judy; "just so I know she's surely coming and I won't be left with an odd man and a vacant place."

She hung up, and Mrs. Trent put the little French telephone back on its hook under the table, saying to the butler at the same time:

"See if the car has returned, Philippe. I thought I heard it drive into the garage some time ago."

Philippe hurried out. Mrs. Trent sat regarding her husband in uneasy silence.

"You're not worried?" he asked.

"Of course I'm worried; I can't help worrying, with a girl like Constance," said his wife. "So self-willed, so impulsive, and unexpected. I only hope—"

She stopped as Philippe returned with the chauffeur.

"Ah—Jermyn. Didn't you drive Miss Constance to the Thayers?" asked Mrs. Trent, turning swiftly upon him.

He stood with his cap in his hand, looking troubled.

"No, ma'am—to the Biltmore," answered Jermyn. "Mr. Readman was waiting there for her on the steps. And she had a bag."

"A bag?" repeated Mrs. Trent, turning white. "Do you mean a suit case?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Trent sat motionless for an instant, gazing in consternation at the chauffeur; then, marshalling her forces swiftly, she said:

"Thank you, Jermyn. Bring the car around at once."

"Yes, ma'am," said Jermyn, departing.

"Philippe," went on Mrs. Trent, like a general issuing commands to her aides, "telephone to the Thayers' that there has been a slight accident to the car. Say that Miss Constance is not hurt, but that she is a little upset and cannot possibly come on to the dinner. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," responded Philippe, and departed.

Mrs. Trent rose. "Now, Will," she said, "if you'll find me some sort of cloak we'll see if we can find her at the Biltmore. We may still be in time to prevent some calamity. If not—I dread to think—"

Her voice trailed away. Her husband went meekly to find her a wrap. Through the long drive to the Biltmore they did not speak.

Mrs. Trent was going over Constance's childhood and girlhood in her mind—living again in rapid sequence a thousand incidents of the past. She had taken her responsibilities of motherhood seriously, had spared no effort on Constance's behalf to insure her a happy life—a safe and secure future.

Her own marriage had not been what she had expected. She had hoped to spare Constance that disaster. It was only for Constance's sake she had gone on all these years. And now—

She couldn't face it. She simply couldn't face it.

At their cozy little table, off to one side of the dance floor, Constance and Tommy were dining luxuriously, when Constance became aware of her mother's approach. She rose to her feet, turning quite white as she saw her mother's stern face.

"Well, Constance? What does this mean?" Mrs. Trent asked, ignoring Tommy, who leaped up, too.

Constance held up her hand, with the wedding ring on it.

"I've married Tommy, mother," she said simply. "I hope you'll forgive us."

Mrs. Trent stared—at the ring—at Constance—at Tommy Readman.

"After all," went on Constance, in the silence, "I'm grown up. I've got to think

for myself—decide for myself—live my own life."

"Of course," said Will Trent kindly.

His wife did not look at him.

"I shall *never* forgive you what you have done and the way you have done it," she said grimly. Her lips were drawn, her eyes hard and bitter. "You've gone your own way—willfully—despite my efforts to advise you. Very well. Now you must accept the consequences of your rashness. Come, Will!"

She turned from them; Constance's eyes sought her father's face. He met her pleading glance wistfully, stooped and kissed her. Then, without a word or a look at Tommy, he followed his wife.

Tommy stared after them, frowning in dismay. Constance's lip quivered.

"They'll think differently to-morrow—or next day," she said, as much to bolster up her own courage as to cheer him.

He nodded.

"Of course. Don't worry about them," he said, trying to rise to the occasion.

But a cloud had been cast over the sunshine of Constance's happiness—a cloud that portended even graver calamities. Tears filled her eyes.

"Suppose *your* mother doesn't like *me*?" she asked timidly.

"She will!" Tommy assured her. "She'll love you. She knows all about you already, you know. She'd have come over with me to-night, only—she's an invalid, I told you."

Constance nodded—and blushed as he laid his hand over hers with an air of proprietorship.

"Don't worry," he begged.

She tried to smile back bravely, but, somehow, she no longer felt like smiling. They paid their check, rose, and started out for Tommy's ranch—which was henceforth to be her home, too.

IV.

SOME time before this, Jack Wayne had arrived at the Plantation to find Winnie Lawrence sitting alone at the table on the edge of the dance floor that was always reserved for her use. It was quite a large

table. She had selected a large one purposely so that any of her friends, who chose to, could always join her there—and she was always glad to welcome those who came. It was part of her business to encourage patronage, for she was an "entertainer" there and it was important to impress the management with the value of her services and her popularity.

But this evening, she was sitting alone and looked rather lonely when Jack joined her.

"Hello!" she called cordially. "I was just wondering if you'd come out to-night. Got a drink on you?"

"Always," smiled Jack, as he sat down, and produced his flask.

"I guess that's pretty nearly true," admitted Winnie, studying him, as he poured the drinks.

She was older than he was, by accurate count, but still looked pretty well at night, under the artificial lights with all her war-paint on. And Jack's crowd agreed that she could certainly "deliver the goods" when it came to sitting down with a uke or a steel guitar and singing popular melodies.

She had a low, very sweet voice that lent itself peculiarly to that sort of music, and she sang with an appealing pathos—even the most blatant and brazen of her songs. She adopted an air of refinement, too. That helped.

She was a pretty clever girl, this Winnie Lawrence; she knew her business and quite a lot more than that. She hadn't wasted her life, if experiences count for anything; and she hadn't failed to learn something from most of the experiences of her rather varied career. But the most important thing she had learned was not to lose either her heart or her head.

She was thinking of that, now, as she watched Jack Wayne with his flask and their glasses, because for the first time in a long while she was finding herself in danger of forgetting. Ever since she had first met this fellow, about two weeks before, something about him had appealed to her tremendously.

It was not that he was handsome; she had known a lot of handsome boys. It was rather something appealing and wistful

about him, a kind of winsome charm that made you sorry for him and sympathetic without any reason at all.

Of course, he drank too much, and he wasted time—but any number of boys in America are in the same condition yearly. Still, he somehow stood out from the rest.

There was a kind of promise about him—something that made one believe him capable of better things. Or so Winnie told herself sometimes at night, when her light was out, and she was finding excuses for herself and taking herself to task.

"Ever think of cutting it out entirely and going on the wagon?" she asked now, as she sipped his father's excellent Scotch.

"Yes, I've thought about it," admitted Jack, grinning.

"Why don't you? Try it. Get down to business. Act your age!"

His smile faded; he realized her seriousness, and grew serious himself in turn.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said. "I don't dare stay sober for long. If I did, I could not stand things. Being in business with the dad, I mean. He has really established this branch here in Los Angeles for me, but he runs it—and I sort of play second fiddle. That's what I hate about the whole thing—second fiddle. I have no chance to prove myself! No responsibility! No chance to see or prove what there is in me—in my judgment—in my ability.

"I must have something in the way of brains, because I'm the dad's son! But how am I ever going to prove it until I get a chance to run things myself my way? You see, I keep thinking of that—and kind of fretting. And, meanwhile, he keeps me doing dull, monotonous routine work. And I can't break away because he started the whole show for me. Do you see? So I just go out and get drunk and forget it."

She had gone on quietly with her dinner.

"He ought to go away and turn the whole outfit over to you," she said now, "and let you stand or fall by what you do with it. I see what you mean, I think. The only way to do anything is to go out and try—and fail—and try again—and gradually learn how. You should have caught my act when I first broke into vaudeville!"

"I know. But nobody else could have told you how to put your songs over. You had to work out your own way!"

"Sure!"

The fellow that has somebody else to go to for instructions is fine as long as he has somebody to go to," went on Jack. "But Lord help him when he has to face any problem or situation alone. *That* was worked out in the late war. But there's no use talking to the dad. He still looks on me as a kid—so—I go on acting like a kid—and will, I guess, until something happens to snap me out of it! Heigh-ho!"

He poured himself another drink and beamed at her. And she beamed back and wished she could think of some perfectly splendid advice to give him, but couldn't—and then some more of his "gang" drifted in and the party began to be gay.

All had pocket flasks or bottles—Jimmy Fagan, who had been expelled from all of the best schools on two continents and had finally been cast out by his millionaire father only to drift to Hollywood on money his mother secretly sent him; a "conscientious" drinker, he called himself, and explained that he was seeing life, now—later, he meant to settle down and write about it, but not until he had learned a lot more.

Then there was Garland Andrews, who had got a good start in the real estate business and had gone strong for a year—until he succumbed to the climate of Southern California and the tropic charms of a motion picture siren. Nowadays he did little but drink and sober up in order to drink again. Every now and then, he varied the monotony by breaking down completely and going off to a "milk farm" for two weeks. After which, he hurried back to begin again.

And Junior Raines, an extra in the movies, who would never go any further and didn't care; and several extra girls, who were really nothing extra—of the type that takes the easiest living, wherever she happens to find herself. There were blond ones and dark ones. They didn't matter.

Jack really despised the whole crew, though they were often his companions. Their great asset was that they let him alone—let him go his own way, solve his

own problems without interference; they never preached at him or tried to reform him. And often, they amused him—especially, when they were drunk.

To-night he drank steadily, bothered deep at the back of his mind by the interview with his father, and, as the evening wore on, he began to show the effects of it. Liquor sometimes makes men gay, sometimes it has quite the opposite effect.

Jack sat gloomy and morose, ready to fight with any one, since he could not fight out the differences between himself and his father. And he was in this mood when a man at a near-by table came up to ask Winnie to dance.

It is quite true that Winnie did not know the man, but as she was an entertainer there and a kind of hostess, she felt a certain obligation—as the man in question had come with two other men and no women. Winnie considered it quite all right, in the circumstances.

She rose, accepting graciously. Winnie never had believed in standing on ceremony. Anything to promote sociability and make the customers have a good time. But since Jack and his gang were at Winnie's table, on the edge of the dance floor, Jack chose to consider that Winnie was under their protection, for the time being at least, and he personally objected very strongly to the intrusion of the strange man.

Rising, not quite steadily, he interfered, saying:

"There are plenty of men in this party if Miss Lawrence wants to dance! Therefore, it behooves me to point out to you that you are 'butting in'!"

"Ah, sit down!" advised the strange man, who was not drunk, and he gave Jack a little shove toward his chair, which was not at all the way to treat Jack, drunk or sober.

Leaping up again, he pursued the couple, who had started to dance off. Despite the protests of the rest of the gang, tearing loose from their detaining hands, he caught up with Winnie and her unknown escort somewhere near the middle of the big dance floor. Seizing the fellow by the back of the neck, he tore him loose from his horrified partner, and sent him spinning toward his table,

which crashed over under the shock of the impact.

"Jack!" cried Winnie angrily.

"That's all right," said Jack, looking stubborn and defiant.

The other two men who had come in with Winnie's unknown admirer picked him up quickly and questioned him as they righted the table. Other couples whose dance had been interrupted stopped to ascertain the cause of the trouble. Some of them were indignant, having been jostled or struck by the unknown man in his precipitate dive. Others were interested and amused and curious. Winnie stood confronting Jack with an angry face.

"How dare you interfere in my affairs?" she cried indignantly. "I'll dance with any one I choose! Understand that! And if you don't like it—"

By this time the strange man was bearing down upon them again, closely observed by his friends and Jack's and some of the other parties; but Winnie interceded before he could reach Wayne.

"Please let him pass! He's drunk! Let's finish this!" she begged quietly.

He hesitated, with a glance at Jack, who stood waiting, scornfully defiant. Then, reluctantly, with a resentful frown, he nodded.

They began to dance again.

Jack looked after them and shrugged disgustedly. Then he went back to his table.

"No use making a scene about it," he said with dignity as he sat down and poured himself another drink.

The others at his table received this observation with a whoop of delight.

As the dance ended Winnie came back to the table and brought the strange man with her.

"Mr. Rice," she said, beginning to introduce him—"Mr. Fagan, Mr. Raines, Miss Martineau, Mr. Andrews."

They all shook hands with him, acknowledging the introduction. Then she came to Jack.

"Mr. Wayne," said Winnie.

The strange man put out his hand. Jack shook his head.

"Won't shake hands with you," he said

doggedly; "but if you'll come outside I'll be glad to punch your face for you."

The strange man turned white with anger, but again Winnie intervened.

"You can shake hands or you can get out," she said succinctly to Jack. "This gentleman and his friends are going to join my party."

And she emphasized it just that way.

"Oh, are they? That's *fine*," said Jack pleasantly. "Then you won't miss me."

He rose and made an elaborate bow to them all, holding on to the back of his chair; then he steered a rather uncertain course toward the door.

Winnie shrugged and sat down, inviting the strange man to take Jack's empty chair. But as he seated himself her eyes wandered past him for just an instant.

Angry as she was at Jack, somehow her heart went out to him. He was such a kid—such a grown-up, lovable kid—and it was a shame.

But Winnie's job was not to mother Jack; it was to please everybody, to cater to everybody, and see that everybody had a good time. So she summoned a smile and plunged into her latest funny story.

V.

OUTSIDE the roadhouse Jack found his car—with the assistance of the starter, who knew him well—and climbed into it.

"The hell with her!" he murmured as he started the motor. "Hell with all of them. A lot of wasters and women no better than they should be!"

They were his father's own words of earlier in the evening, still lingering somewhere in his memory.

He threw her into gear, went spinning down the driveway and narrowly missed another car that was just turning in as he turned out. They didn't crash, but the incident steadied him.

He began to drive slowly and carefully. It was an odd thing that he might be too drunk to talk plainly or walk straight, and yet he could drive his car.

But in the opposite direction came a driver whose mind was less intent upon the road ahead than upon his companion in the

seat beside him. It was Tommy Readman, driving furiously as he always drove outside the city limits, and bending to whisper lovingly to Constance, who crouched beside him, depressed and anxious.

It was her mood that was egging him on to drive recklessly. He was afraid that any moment she might weep and repent and beg him to take her home. He wanted to get her to the ranch as swiftly as possible—to his mother—to his home—where she would feel the step that she had taken was irrevocable.

And still, despite his befuddled condition, Jack might have seen the oncoming car in time to avert the tragedy except that the road turned sharply just there and was very narrow.

There was a crash as the cars came together, head on. Tommy's machine, being the heavier, sent Jack's roadster spinning to one side and into the ditch, where it stood quivering, undamaged save for some broken glass. And out of it—after one dazed moment—came Jack, unhurt, but suddenly very, very sober and frightened.

He ran back to find the other car. It had crashed into a bank, turning turtle and throwing Constance out as it turned. She had fainted from the shock, but was already coming to.

"Tommy—*Tommy!*" she cried agonizedly as Jack bent over her.

He turned to look for Tommy. Constance staggered up, saw Tommy pinned beneath the car, and with a cry went toward him. The wheel had held him in his seat; he was caught under it—crushed.

Together, Constance and Jack tried to get him out. It was a herculean task, even for Jack, who had a powerful build. But in the end they contrived it.

Sitting flat in the stubble, Constance held Tommy's head in her lap, calling his name piteously, while hot tears splashed down on his still, white face. Jack stood motionless, pale as death too, and feeling unutterably helpless as he watched the girl's agony. And so Tommy found them when he opened his eyes.

He looked up for an instant, bewildered, confused. Then he recognized Constance—remembered. He wet his lips.

"If I—go," he said in a hoarse whisper, with great difficulty, "you—my mother—the ranch—" That was all he could manage.

She leaned over him tenderly—finding somewhere within her a gentleness, a sweetness that she had never known before, and a great courage.

"That's all right, Tommy," she said quite steadily. "Don't you worry. Don't worry about anything."

He smiled, just a little, and closed his eyes with a sigh. She saw the change coming over him, stared incredulously; raised startled, frightened eyes to Jack's.

"He's—dead!" she whispered, horrified. "Dead!"

Jack nodded, lifted him very gently and carried him across to where the roadster stood. Tommy's car was utterly wrecked.

Jack opened the emergency seat in back and placed Tommy in it, covering him with a robe. Then he came back to the girl, who still sat there, stunned.

"I'll take him home," he said gently, "and you—if you'll tell me where."

She brushed a hand back over her harassed brow and rose, swaying dizzily. He threw out an arm to steady her.

"Why—yes," she repeated dully, "we—we must go home—to *his* home. His mother's—waiting—and she's an invalid." She shuddered. "I'll have to go to her—tell her—help her through!" She looked off toward where Tommy lay, huddled so strangely under the robe.

"He's—dead!" she said.

"Yes," said Jack.

"And—we had just been married."

"Married?" he repeated.

"Just," she said. "We were on our way back when—when—" She looked up at Jack, her eyes suddenly blazing, and she beat upon his breast fiercely with her clenched fists, crying out: "You murderer—murderer!"

"Don't—for God's sake!" he protested. "It was not my fault. He was speeding—coming round the bend—"

"Only a few minutes ago—he was as strong and well as you are! And it *wasn't* his fault—what happened! It was *yours!* You should have been the one to suffer."

He realized the futility of argument.

"I wish I had been," he said quietly. "Because no one would have missed me—much."

He seemed to have aged. There was a look of responsibility and care engraven on his face that had never been there before.

"You were *drunk!*" she cried accusingly, and shrank from him, her eyes furious, disgusted, scornful. "You can't deny that. You were drunk!"

"Yes," he admitted quietly, "but I'm quite sober now. Won't you please—get in?"

Crying a little, helplessly, she limped toward the car; she had bruised herself in falling and she had not realized it until now. He helped her in beside him in the front seat. Just so, she had sat beside Tommy—Tommy, who was dead now, lying covered by the robe in back.

And so Jack turned his car and started for the Readman Ranch down San Diego way, going as slowly and carefully as he could drive.

They did not speak at all, save when he asked her once if she was cold, and drew her coat closer around her. She shrank then from his touch, as though she feared its contamination. And a little later, when he advised her to try to sleep a little if she could, she answered wearily:

"I couldn't sleep—I couldn't—"

And she went on crying softly, helplessly; and her grief tore at his heart. She seemed such a child, for all her talk of marriage.

And so the weary hours passed.

VI.

THE house was dimly lit. Mrs. Readman had given them up and had gone to bed, though she had left one light burning in case they should come. They beat upon the door, and the racket wakened the dogs, who began to bay mournfully. Odd, thought Jack, that they should bay instead of barking and challenging the intruders.

A few moments later his mother came, anxious-eyed, just aroused from her sleep. She was a little wisp of a woman, with

gray hair—thin gray hair—and sunken cheeks; and tired, wrinkled, toil-worn hands. She had wrapped a woolen house gown about her hastily, and had come—already fearfully anticipating mishap. And it seemed to Jack and Constance that the instant her eyes rested on them she *knew*—before ever they could tell her.

Constance went to her with outstretched arms and held her close as she whispered: "Oh, Mother Readman, there's been an accident! And Tommy—Tommy—"

It was not necessary to say it. She guessed, and her face went gray. There was evidence enough, to be sure. He was not there, and they were—in a strange motor car—with something—some one wrapped in a robe, in back.

"*Dead?*" she asked, through dry lips.

They nodded. She bore up, with a great effort, though her world was crashing in ruins about her, and said quite calmly to Jack:

"Will you—bring him in here, please?"

Jack lifted him gently and bore him in, laying him upon the davenport. Then his mother went to him, throwing herself down on her knees beside the body; and Jack turned away and closed the door.

Outside in the dimly lighted little hallway, Jack stood by the doorway, unhappily looking out into the night. Constance sank down on the steps, helpless, exhausted. And silence reigned between them, broken only by the older woman's sobs from the room beyond.

Alone with her dead, Mrs. Readman gave way to her grief, bursting into violent and unrestrained weeping until Jack—unable to bear any more—turned sharply to Constance and cried:

"For God's sake, go to her—do something—say something!"

And she rose slowly, without a word, and went in.

It was the kind of thing the girl never had had to do before. Hers had been a happy, sheltered life always; she had been spared contact with the grim realities. But she strove instinctively now to make up for Tommy, who was not there.

She showed his mother her wedding ring

and told her, bitterly, how it had happened. It was not the true version that she gave; it was *her* version, laying the blame for the accident entirely upon Jack's shoulders. But she believed it to be true, and his mother accepted it, and both their hearts hardened toward Jack for robbing them of husband and son, and their bitter anger dried their tears.

"It was murder!" cried Constance passionately. "Even though he didn't intend it. He was drunk and—and driving recklessly. And the law ought to punish him. I'll see that it punishes him! I'll avenge him, if it is the last thing I do!"

"That won't bring Tommy back," said Tommy's mother brokenly.

"Nothing will do that," said Constance; "but we can save some other poor creatures, perhaps. We can make an example of this man. There's too much disregard for other people's lives."

And turning impulsively, she added: "I must get his name. I must get the number of his car."

She moved toward the door swiftly, followed by the older woman. The hall was empty.

"He's gone!" she cried. "The coward!"

"Wait! There's a light in the kitchen," said Mrs. Readman.

They found Jack there. He had put the coffeepot on the fire and had set out cups and saucers. As they came in, staring, he turned and smiled in a humble, awkward, rather abashed fashion.

"I waited—to see if there was anything I could do," he said. "And meanwhile—I started the coffee. We'll all—be the better for it, I think."

Constance advanced, her face terrible in its grim and unrelenting hatred.

"Do you think we'll break bread with you?" she asked fiercely.

"But it was not my fault, really," he protested. "I was driving all the more carefully because I had been drinking—"

"So you mean to blame the dead—poor Tommy, who isn't here to defend himself or give you the lie!"

Jack flushed and felt helpless.

"In any case," he said, "I can't undo

what is done. I would, gladly, if I could; please understand that. I certainly did not mean to harm any one—and I'll do anything that I can to—help!"

"What can you do?" asked Constance bitterly.

"I don't know—that's just it; I don't know!" He shrugged helplessly and turned appealingly to Mrs. Readman.

"If you think by this attitude to win our sympathy or escape the consequences of your criminal recklessness, you're very much mistaken," cried Constance then, as the older woman remained silent. "I hope you *do* regret what has occurred—I hope you *do* want to make amends! But that's not enough. I'm going to see that you're punished. I'm going to see that an example is made of you so that your kind is taught a lesson. I'm going to prosecute you to the full extent of the law. And if I can, I'm going to see you sent to jail—or hanged!"

He nodded slowly.

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it," he said, "but I promise you I'll take my medicine, whatever it proves to be."

Then he poured out the coffee, which had come to a boil, and set the cups on the table, saying:

"You'd better drink this while it's hot—both of you. You'll do no one any good by breaking down now. And there's a hard time coming that has to be faced."

Then he left them, going out to admit the doctor and the undertaker—for whom he had previously telephoned. The door closed quietly behind him.

"I hate him!" cried the girl tempestuously. "I wish he would go away!"

But Tommy Readman's mother sank down wearily and began to stir the coffee he had poured. There were tears in her eyes—unshed.

"He's—being very kind, I think," she said slowly. "If he should go, we'd have no one to turn to. And I'm helpless. I'm not strong, you see. I've always depended on Tommy."

"I'm strong, and not at all helpless," cried Constance.

"But you're not a man, my dear," said the older woman. "And this boy—well, he

didn't *mean* to harm any one, I'm sure. And I never was one to thirst for vengeance myself. I can't see that it's going to do *us* any good to prosecute him. And we need him. Some one's got to take hold here, now that Tommy's gone. And there's nobody else."

Constance stared at her incredulously.

"I don't believe in accidents," went on Mrs. Readman slowly. "I don't believe any one ever goes before the Lord intends he should. And I think maybe it was just Tommy's time—and the Lord called him this way, so there would be some one to kind of take his place, and I wouldn't be left quite alone. The Lord's ways are strange and past understanding."

"You mean," cried Constance, "that he could serve us better by staying here and carrying on Tommy's work than by going to jail or giving up his life?"

"If he would," nodded the older woman. "But it's for him to decide. Maybe—if he is kind of wildlike, it might be what is best for him, too."

Constance rose and crossed and put her arms about the other woman impulsively.

"It shall be as you say, of course," she agreed. "Your loss is greater than mine, I know. We will give this—this man—his choice."

VII.

JACK got no sleep at all that night. Dawn came by the time the doctor had written the death certificate and the undertaker had finished. And afterward he had called his father on the telephone to tell him what had happened and to explain that he meant to stay on at the Readman ranch as long as he was needed.

His father protested at first, thinking this merely a new excuse for shirking uncongenial work at the office; but later he yielded the point, promising to send Jack's mother out with some clothes and a change of linen. Just why he had yielded, he scarcely knew himself; it seemed so quixotic for Jack to take upon himself the responsibilities of the Readman family, since he had not even known them before the accident, and he assured his father he had been in nowise responsible for it.

But there had been something different in the boy's voice—a determined quality that his father instinctively realized he had never been aware of before—and he hung up the receiver at last, with a new hope in his heart.

So it was early morning before Jack finally threw himself into a big chair, in the room opposite the one where the coffin stood, and tried to relax. Mrs. Readman had gone back to bed, yielding to Constance's gentle persuasion, and Constance had gone to sit near her until she slept.

It was an odd wedding night for the poor girl—a dreadful, hideous wedding night! Sitting there in the dimly lighted room that was quiet and restful and quaint with the old lady's mid-Victorian things about, she had time at last to think about it and to face her future.

Only a few short hours before she had made an important decision—hastily, perhaps, still smarting under the leash of her mother's authority, rebelling against her mother's firm discipline; but she had decided, and she had gone through with the impulsive plan to elope with Tommy Readman. Now, Tommy was gone, and she was a widow without ever having been a wife.

Her life was to go on without Tommy, just as though she had yielded to her mother's persistent urging and had given Tommy up. Evidently they had not been destined to join their lives together. Perhaps it would have been better for Tommy if she had not agreed to elope. Perhaps there would have been no accident then, and he might still be here to cheer and comfort his mother's declining years. But there was nothing to be gained by such vain imaginings. It *had* happened! The thing was done. And now—

She thought of Jack, and went calmly over the old lady's opinion of him—and her point of view gradually impressed Constance; the logic of it was undeniable. So when the older woman's gentle breathing convinced her that she slept, Constance went softly out and down again to Jack.

At the faint sound of her approaching footsteps he was on his feet, but he looked so pale and tired and distressed in the faint morning light that she motioned him

swiftly to sit down again, and herself took the chair that was nearest his, saying gravely:

"I am sorry for the things I said to you before. I've come to apologize. I was overwrought and bitterly resentful."

"I know," answered Jack, flushing. "I understand perfectly. Please forget it."

"I was harsh, unjust—or at least unmerciful," went on the girl determinedly. "Mrs. Readman has made me see that. And she doesn't at all favor the idea of prosecuting you; so I have agreed to give it up—but only on one condition. It is really to discuss that that I have come down again to-night. I want to get it settled, if possible, before she wakes."

"What is it?" asked Jack simply.

"That you make reparation for this death that has come about through you by taking upon your own shoulders the burdens that Tommy has been forced to lay down."

He stared at her wonderingly. "You mean?"

"That you go on with Tommy's work, which you interrupted—that you take upon yourself the responsibilities that were his and that he can no longer carry."

"You mean the ranch here?" he asked.

"I mean the ranch, his mother—everything. He borrowed the money to start in business here; it's not been paid back yet, and never can be unless some one goes on with his work. He had no life insurance; his mother will be destitute if notes fall due and creditors seize the ranch."

"Then—my own case is to be considered, too. I married Tommy against my parents' wishes. I can't go back to them now, widowed, penniless. I mean, I won't go back that way. I owe it to Tommy—not to. And for his sake I have a duty toward his mother, too. But my father always supported me. I have no money of my own. All I can do is help a little—if you will stay and try to make this place pay."

He studied her, listened with knitted brows and intent blue eyes.

"I know absolutely nothing about ranching," he answered slowly then. "But I'm willing to try it—if you and his mother wish it. I dare say I can learn."

"Then—it's settled?" said Constance quietly.

"Yes—settled!"

She rose with a little businesslike inclination of her head—hesitated for just an instant—and left him. He stood staring after her with pitying, rather wistful eyes.

All through the interview, though she had striven to be fair and calm and impersonal, he had been aware of her deep-seated resentment. Plainly she still felt that it had been all his fault—nothing could convince her otherwise. She had only put aside her desire for vengeance; she hadn't forgiven him nor absolved him, not by any manner of means.

He sighed and crossed to the window and looked out. Tommy's one hired helper, Indian Joe, was letting out the small herd of goats, unaware of the tragedy that had befallen.

As he stood there, thinking, the sun came out.

VIII.

JACK communicated to his mother his determination to stay on and run the Readman ranch, and she in turn passed it on to his father, who drove out immediately to register a protest. He had organized the Los Angeles branch of his business solely on Jack's account, and he was disgusted and amazed at Jack's cool decision to abandon it for a second-rate ranch in San Diego County—a *goat* ranch, at that!

But by the time Wayne, senior, arrived, Jack had his arguments ready. He said nothing about his responsibility toward the Readman family, because he knew that he had been in nowise to blame for the accident, and so he really felt no such responsibility. But he did feel a tremendous sympathy for Mrs. Readman and the girl. He wanted to help them. But that reason would not have appealed to his father. What he said to the latter was simply this:

"Dad, I know you're disappointed, and I know you've had only my interest at heart in starting the organization for me down town, and there are fellows who would think themselves mighty lucky to step into a sinecure like that—a growing business already built up and under way and running

smoothly—but I guess I'm not one of them. I'm too much like you. I want to build up something myself. I want to fight it out myself and win—or lose and take the consequences.

"I know this ranch isn't much—maybe it isn't worth a whoop in hell—but it's something I can take hold of and run and experiment with, and maybe it'll help me to find out whether I'm going to be a big man, able to stand on my own feet and use my own judgment and get somewhere, or whether I'm just going to be a rich man's son who has to follow his father's advice always and live on an income from a trust fund.

"That's the kind of chap you'd make of me, dad, whether you realize it or not, and I don't want to be that kind unless I have to. You started with next to nothing, and I'm going to—right out here. And if I make a failure of it—well, then, I'll know where I belong, and I'll come back to the office and take a routine job for the rest of my life. Do you see?"

His father meditated, frowning. "But this ranch? I don't think any one could make it pay—judging by the looks of it. And what do you know about ranching?"

"Nothing. But I don't know much about *anything*. Might as well learn ranching as anything else. I've got to tackle *something*, and I think I'd like this."

"Very well," said Wayne, senior, thoughtfully. "Try it, if you feel that is what you want to do. Certainly, it'll be better than drinking and batting about. Try it. And in the meantime I'll keep right on building up the business back yonder. So if you ever want to come back, it'll be there."

"Thanks, dad," said Jack; and they shook hands on it.

But the older man drove off, shaking his head. Jack, watching him, realized that his father felt the experiment foredoomed to failure. But he was not cast down by this. He felt a growing force within him, and he knew he could make good.

He hadn't gone to Tommy's funeral. He had intended going, just to be there for Mrs. Readman to lean on, but Constance,

coming down in black, found him waiting in the hall, and in her eyes he read such horror and amazement that he changed his mind. She still looked upon him as Tommy's murderer, he saw, and she thought it inhuman of him to be present under the circumstances.

So Jack stayed at home and saw that the house was cleared up and made cheerful against their return.

Mrs. Readman felt no such resentment as she took pains to assure him that very same night. Coming in softly, she laid her hand on his arms and said:

"I'm going to turn Tommy's keys and papers and things over to you, Jack, if you don't mind. It would relieve me of such an unhappy and distressing task if you would just take charge. I'm no good at business, anyway; and I feel I can rely on you."

"Thank you," Jack answered gratefully. "I'll do my best for you."

So he took the keys and went into Tommy's little office and closed the door; and the further he went into Tommy's affairs, the gladder he was that the dead boy's mother had been spared the job. For, to his surprise and distress, he discovered in no time at all that Tommy Readman had been a thorough rotter. One letter, dated the very night of the accident, read:

Don't know whether you were stalling me to-night or not, but if you do manage to marry the Trent heiress, don't forget the two hundred you lost to me at poker and never paid, or I'll make things hot for you, old boy!

Yours,
DICK DARCY.

And another ran:

DEAR TOMMY:

I have written you three times since my husband left me *on your account*, but you do not answer. I am ill and destitute. Surely, you do not mean to ignore your responsibility toward me? You swore you loved me—"

He could read no more of that.

And then—bills—business correspondence revealing the fact that the ranch was heavily encumbered with debts and not at all on a paying basis. Plainly, the sudden death of her husband had been a blessing to Constance Readman, though she did not

suspect it—and to the dead boy's mother, too.

But he determined at once that he would never give them an inkling of the truth. Let them keep their illusions regarding the dead boy, since he could no longer harm them now, and to defame him would help nobody.

So Jack burned up in the grate the mass of damning evidence that he had found and wiped Tommy's record clean. And, upstairs, Tommy's widow cried into her pillow for the lover who was lost to her, and hated the man she felt was entirely to blame.

IX.

THE Trents sent for Constance as soon as they learned of the tragedy that had befallen, but Constance quietly but firmly refused to go back home. In Tommy's home she could feel that she was being faithful to his memory and lending what comfort she could to his bereaved mother. And that was some source of satisfaction to her, for she loved Tommy, now that he was gone, more than she had ever loved him before.

She moved about the house in her black clothes, a tragic figure, so young, so pathetic, so unforgettable.

Even his mother seemed to bear her loss with more resignation; and certainly she treated Jack more kindly. In fact, she soon took to sitting near him, as he bent over his papers and books and accounts at night, and often chatted with him, and always looked after his comfort in a motherly way. But Constance saw him always as an intruder who had taken Tommy's place, and she either ignored him or treated him with calm, impersonal aloofness—much as she treated the Filipino cook or Indian Joe.

Jack accepted her attitude philosophically. He could not ensconce himself in her good graces at the expense of defaming her husband's memory, so he let things stand as they were. True, he sometimes wished that she were kinder; but he was too busy to be really unhappy about it, and he hoped that time would soften her.

Meanwhile, after a few visits to neigh-

boring ranches, and a careful investigation into the situation, Jack speedily realized that the proposition as Readman had been handling it was hopeless. He hadn't a large enough herd to warrant a return on his investment. Jack decided that the only way the place could be made to pay at all was by going into it in a much bigger way; so he plunged.

He got several cowboys, offering them a bonus in addition to their pay if the ranch could be made to thrive. He borrowed enough money through his father to settle all claims against Readman, to make some needed repairs, and to add to the herd. In all this he was not gambling. He knew that ranching was a legitimate business enterprise and that it could be a prosperous one. There was always a demand for cattle, and he had the grazing space and the climate. Beyond that it was merely a matter of getting down to business and throwing himself heart and soul into his work.

Until the accident had precipitated him into the lives of the Readmans he had never even thought of becoming a rancher—in fact, he had been aware of no very definite inclination or bent in regard to a life work; all that he knew was that he was neither satisfied nor contented with the business his father had organized for him; but he had always had a leaning toward the outdoors, and ranching certainly measured up in that respect.

Then, too, as he got under way there was the absorbing interest of a growing thing. There is in all of us, fundamentally, the instinct to create or build. It manifests itself first in the child with its blocks. And as we grow and its develops, it makes for progress.

He lived in the saddle, he and Buddy Carson alternating with the other two cowboys in riding the range as the herd grew and grew. And sometimes when the night was still Constance could hear him singing as he rode, and she knew his voice always.

It was not a trained voice, but he had used it a good deal, chiefly with the glee club at college, and though it was not powerful, it was a peculiarly sympathetic voice, a barytone. Then, too, the songs that he sang were different—not the modern songs

at all, but rather quaint, old-fashioned sentimental ones.

It had been explained to him that so long as he sang, and the herd was aware of him, it did not matter much what he sang; the herd was not particular. So he sang whatever came into his head. There was one called "Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder," that was all about a lost love and had a very pathetic strain; and another that he seemed quite sure of and sang with haunting plaintiveness ran:

The sunshine and you,
And the soft morning dew,
Like the tears on your cheek
When we parted;
My fond heart awakes
As the glorious day breaks,
For the sunrise reminds me of you.

Eventually, Constance managed to make out all the words of that one—and she wondered about him. She speculated on what his life had been before the night his car had crashed into them; what memories the songs stirred; and she wondered, too, how things would have been with her if this man had never come into her life, if the motor wreck hadn't happened, if Tommy had lived. And she would always be cooler than ever toward Jack, thereafter; and he would ask Mrs. Readman gravely:

"I wonder if she will ever forgive me?"

Shortly after one of these occasions the older woman went into Constance's room quite late, and found the girl lying in bed, with her hands behind her bobbed head, her dark eyes gazing into space thoughtfully, questioningly, and a little bitterly. She was just lying there, not reading, though there were books in plenty on her stand, and one open on the bed.

"Not sleepy?" asked Mrs. Readman sympathetically, hesitating just inside the doorway.

"No," answered Constance. "Come in."

The old lady came and sat on the side of the bed. She was wrapped in her thick gray housegown, and her sparse gray hair was neatly plaited behind. Her face seemed more lined and wrinkled than usual, and in the shaded light her eyes shone.

"I'm not sleepy, either," she said, "but then I find I *need* less and less sleep as I

grow older. Seems as if it ought to be the other way round. When one is young, one has more use for the extra time—more interests. But then, as things are the way they are, I suppose it's right. I usually find out afterward that things generally happen the way they should—even when I haven't thought so at the time."

"Do you really believe that?" asked Constance quietly. "That everything happens for the best?"

"Yes, I do," answered the old lady simply. "Don't you?"

"No," answered Constance, "I'm afraid I don't. I'm afraid I find the world pretty much upside down. It looks to me as if nothing happens as it should."

"Well," went on Mrs. Readman, "you are pretty young to form conclusions yet, aren't you? You haven't the perspective on life that I have, after all."

They were silent then an instant, and Jack's voice drifted in to them from far away, very faint and sweet.

"For one thing," broke out the girl passionately, "I can't see why Tommy isn't out there singing, and the other one—where Tommy is."

The old lady nodded slowly and her eyes grew a bit misty as she replied:

"I don't know the reason either, my dear, so I can't answer that for you; but I know there is a reason because there is always a reason for everything. Maybe we will never know. But in a universe where the sun rises every morning and sets every night—where the stars come out always in their appointed places—where flowers grow from seeds—always the same flowers from the same seeds—and the seasons follow one another in their regular order—well, it's plain that *some* sort of rule is being kept, that some very definite laws are being followed. And when such big things are so perfectly worked out and managed, how can we doubt that our own little lives aren't being lived according to the same scheme of cause and effect?"

"It's almost sinful, I think, to doubt a Governing Hand. Just as I think it sinful to grieve too much over disappointments and—and losses. It's a criticism of the

Creator, my dear—grieving so much. Don't you think?"

"One can't help grieving," answered Constance.

"Yes, one can. One can learn to be philosophical, resigned. I loved my boy, too, you know—dearly. Perhaps not quite as you loved him. Mother love is different; it takes cognizance of faults and failings and weaknesses, and increases, perhaps, as the greater need for it develops. I loved Tommy, I mean, though he was never quite so perfect in my eyes as he was in yours. You idolized him, of course. We women always do idolize our lovers, you know."

"But facts must be faced, my dear. Tommy's gone, and you're still young—with the rest of your life before you—years and years, no doubt. You can't go on wasting them on a memory. That would not be *living*. And surely we're here to live—to experience—to suffer—to enjoy. You have got to forget, to accept your fate, and go on. You've got to begin again—like the spider on my back porch in New England."

"Before we came out here to live I used to watch that spider, and it was a great example to me, I can tell you. As often as its web was broken down, it was never discouraged; it just started in to weave again. I didn't want to break up my home in the East, sever lifelong ties, come here to the West a stranger, at my time of life. But Tommy had set his heart on it. And what with Tommy's arguments and the spider's grim example, I came. I want you to think about all this, my dear."

"Perhaps if you hadn't come West, what has happened might not have happened," said Constance.

"Perhaps—or perhaps it might have happened without bringing me the solace that I find in you and in Jack Wayne."

Constance stared up at her wonderingly.

"You do find solace in him, don't you? You *like* him—the murderer of your boy!"

"I don't think of him in that way," said the older woman, "because he never intentionally harmed Tommy, or any one, in his life, I'm sure. He was only the agent, unwittingly. It was God took Tommy. And

Jack Wayne is trying hard to fill Tommy's place. So—I do like him for that—yes—and I'm grateful. He need not have stayed here. No jury would have held him guilty of murder. And I can't think what we should have done without him, we'd have been so helpless."

She rose and moved to the window and stood there looking out.

"It's a lonely life here for a young lad like that," she said. "Just work from morning till night, with nothing to break the monotony of it but meals and his night's rest and an occasional chat with an old woman like me. And things could be so different for him—if he hadn't a rigid sense of duty, or obligation, or sympathy. I don't know which it is that makes him stay."

Constance did not answer; she still lay motionless in the big bed, thinking. And a long pause ensued, charged with feeling.

"Well, good night, my child," said the old lady at last, and she turned back from the window to kiss the girl's tear-wet face.

"Good night," answered Constance very humbly.

X.

THE next day Constance smiled at Jack, and it was a red-letter day in his life. He had come up to the house for the mail that Buddy Carson had brought out from town, and he found her sorting it, on the back porch in the sun.

Her own letters lay in her lap—quite a heap of them in variously tinted envelopes; notes from girls that she knew; invitations.

As he accepted his letters from her hands, warmed by her smile of greeting, her first friendly smile, he said gravely:

"It must be very dull for you here, with no friends near you and so little to occupy your time."

"Oh, I don't know. I run the house," pointed out Constance.

"Yes, but even household tasks are tedious, aren't they? And I can imagine that your girlhood was quite different. I mean gayer—bright teas and theater parties and dances and receptions and musicals. Probably those things would not interest you

now," he hastened to add, seeing the shadow in her eyes; "but—I was wondering if you wouldn't like to take advantage of the life here by making the acquaintance of some of the pastimes that are available. You could learn to ride and shoot, for instance, and you really ought to know how."

She meditated.

"I dare say," she agreed presently. "And I have ridden, you know."

"I know—show horses—with an English saddle," he smiled.

"Yes."

"You'll find this sort of riding quite different," he went on. "Just let me rope a horse for you in the corral—and try it. Will you?"

"Yes," she answered slowly.

As she went to change, donning breeches, a loose shirt and a felt hat, he roped and saddled a horse for her, and she did find it quite different, as he had predicted. But she was not timid, and she had a good seat and "horse sense," and Buddy Carson and Mrs. Readman, who came to look on, encouraged her so enthusiastically that presently her spirits revived and she began to like it.

There was a thrill about cross-country riding that was new to her, and the exercise and outdoor life that now began for her brought a new zest into living. Color deepened in her cheeks, too, and she acquired a tan that horrified her mother when she drove out for tea.

Her first attempts at target practice, too, were just as ludicrous as her first maneuvers on the horse, but she gradually acquired skill and found a growing sense of satisfaction in it. And as she found herself more and more in Jack's company—although the other cowboys were usually present likewise, of course—she found it easier and easier to let down her guard; for he praised her so enthusiastically when she distinguished herself and laughed so heartily, yet so kindly, when she proved unaccountably awkward.

So—imperceptibly—almost in spite of herself, they grew to be friends.

When his first shipment was ready for market, Jack was like a boy in his ex-

ciment and joy and pride. A thousand head with his brand mark on them! It was the beginning of success. Already he was planning how to spend the money. One note was to be taken up; some yearlings were to be bought; alterations were to be made in the ranch house.

He talked these things over constantly with Mrs. Readman and Constance. Mrs. Readman entered into the spirit of it readily, but Constance's pleasure and pride in his achievements was shadowed by the constant feeling that Tommy might have done all this, that the triumph might have been *his*.

She tried hard to remember what the old lady had said to her about resigning herself and forgetting, and letting bygones be bygones—she tried hard not to feel bitter—but it was not easy.

And then came the storm.

Electric storms are rare in that country, and so are always unexpected. And this one came with startling suddenness—in the night—while Jack and Buddy were riding the range. First, a roaring wind that came up out of nowhere, unheralded, followed almost instantly by brilliant flashes of lightning and echoing thunder. The herd huddled together, terrified, wet and helpless as the rain began.

"Wow!" wailed Jack, as he and Buddy met. "Wish we had our slickers. We're going to get wet to the skin if this keeps up!"

"Wet—hell!" growled Buddy warningly. "Keep a-singing, boy! There's goin' to be trouble if the herd stampedes!"

Inside, Mrs. Readman got up as the storm broke, and went into Constance's room. She realized that Jack and Buddy hadn't their slickers, and that the other boys were in the bunkhouse fast asleep and might not wake. Opening Constance's door quietly, she found the girl lying wide-eyed, watching the storm.

She had been oppressed all day by a feeling of something impending. Restless, nervous, frightened without knowing quite what disturbed her. Now the tension had relaxed, and a growing excitement stirred in her veins in response to the wildness of the storm.

"Awake?" asked the old lady, hesitating in the doorway.

"Yes. The storm wakened me. It's wonderful, isn't it? Exciting—thrilling!"

"It's *wet*," answered Mrs. Readman grimly, "and the boys will be soaked through. We ought to get their slickers out to them some way."

"Of course," cried Constance instantly, sitting up. "I never thought! They'll be drenched! *I'll* ride out to them at once."

"I don't think you'd better risk it, in all this storm," answered the old lady anxiously. "But if you would go and wake one of the other boys?"

"Nonsense! They're tired out, and they need their sleep much more than I do. Besides, I'm not frightened at all. I love storms. And I can manage, I'm sure."

She leaped out of bed, eagerly, glad of the chance to be stirring, and hurriedly slipped into her riding things. The old lady watched her admiringly, but uneasily, and reiterated her uncertainty as to the wisdom of the step; but Constance felt a glowing sense of confidence and laughingly reassured her.

She got the slickers and rolled them up; kissed Mrs. Readman, and let herself out of the house, beating her way toward the corral against the wind. It came whirling down upon her with amazing force and the rain pelted her unmercifully, but she was dressed for rough weather, and she loved it—the feeling of conquering the elements, the sense of superior force and power.

At the corral she roped her horse as Jack and Buddy taught her to do, and quieted him with a few gentle words. But the storm had his nerves on edge, and she decided to ride him without a saddle, rather than waste time on such unnecessary preliminaries. So, mounting him easily enough, she started off.

There had come a lull in the storm, and she had no difficulty until she came into plain sight of the herd, and had been seen by Jack and Buddy. Waving gayly, she was coming on toward them at a gallop, when suddenly there came a flash and a deafening roar.

The lightning had struck a tree on the far side of the herd, sending terror into the

hearts of the already frightened beasts. Instantly they were off, turning away from the falling tree and heading directly for Constance.

Buddy shouted wildly; Jack's heart stood still for an instant as he realized her peril. Either she did not realize it, or was unable to think fast enough to avoid it, for she merely pulled her horse back upon his haunches and stood her ground.

Then Jack spurred his horse forward, drawing his gun. It was a race with the stampeding herd. Though they had an instant's start of him, he gained rapidly, edging into it, firing repeatedly at the ground ahead in a valiant effort to turn them aside.

At first it seemed as though it was a futile attempt—they were too paralyzed by fright to heed his shouts, but gradually they began to shift, pushing away from the flash of his gat and the sting of the turf.

So—they passed Constance by as Jack reached her, and she fell fainting into his arms.

Buddy stopped only long enough to make sure that she was safe, and to catch up his slicker; then he followed the herd. Jack, meanwhile dragged Constance over upon his horse, and, holding her close in his arms, rode back as swiftly as he could toward the house.

But before they reached it she had recovered, and, realizing, swiftly tried to free herself from his embrace.

"Careful," he cautioned in her ear. "Please lie still—just an instant more!"

And she obeyed him, though she would have given anything to be free; for the gratitude and joy and pain that she felt as she found herself lying close against him overwhelmed her with terror. This contact with him—the strength and security of his arms—the pounding of his heart against her—made her realize at last what she had been fighting almost from the first moment of their meeting—her growing admiration—her love for him—the tremendous attraction he had for her.

For, lying there now, helplessly facing it at last, she told herself that it was wicked, wrong, heinous, and could come to noth-

ing. For the death of Tommy stood between them. This man who held her so gently was Tommy's murderer. And she loved him! *She loved him with all her heart!*

At the door of the ranch house Jack let her down, and as Mrs. Readman had heard them coming and was waiting in the lighted doorway, Constance ran to her without a word or a backward look; and Jack beat a hasty retreat, following Buddy and the herd.

He, too, had suddenly realized how much she had come to mean to him, and he was bewildered. He wanted to get away into the quiet of the night to think what he must do. The situation was too much for him—too much, at any rate, for him to cope with without due consideration.

He respected her loyalty to Tommy's memory, unworthy as he knew Tommy to have been. But even to win her he could not see himself defaming a dead man. And there was Mrs. Readman to protect, too. Even if he were to shatter Constance's illusion regarding Tommy, could he destroy the mother's belief in her son?

The more he thought of it, the more hopeless the tangle seemed; and the more he realized that only one course was open to him: he must give her up. It was hard to think of, now that he had held her trembling in his arms, now that he had suddenly come to know what life might mean. But there seemed no other way.

At least, the ranch was on a paying basis at last. He could leave Buddy in charge, go away, try to forget her. But the prospect turned him cold, made his heart sink with despair.

The years that stretched before him—empty of her! The long, long years!

XI.

CONSTANCE, lying sleepless in the dark, after Mrs. Readman had given her a hot drink and had tucked her in, arrived at the same decision that Jack had reached. Her love for him seemed to her sinful. It must be torn out of her heart ruthlessly, denied, annihilated. And realizing this, she buried her face in her arms, and, smothering the

sound in the pillows, wept her heart out. It seemed to her that life held more tragedy for her than she could bear.

But the morning found her calm and resolute, determined upon the course that she had decided to pursue. She packed swiftly, before Jack returned, and came down to breakfast dressed for her journey.

"Why, Constance—what's this?" cried the old lady, startled at the sight of her. "I didn't even know you were up. I was planning to let you sleep late."

"I'm going back to town, Mother Readman," said Constance quietly. "I made up my mind in the night. I guess—this last adventure was just a bit too much for me. I—suddenly—want to go home!"

Her lips quivered a bit at that, and the stinging tears came welling to her eyes, but she fought them back firmly. It was a lie, of course—she *didn't* want to go home. She hated the thought of going back to the formal, conventional, stupid life she had led before—the life her mother lived, and her friends.

She wanted to stay here; it was the only place she could ever be happy, the only place she ever had been happy. But there was no other course open to her but to go, and to let them think here that she wanted to—that she was happy going. For either she or Jack must go, that was plain—and Jack was needed here.

Mrs. Readman relied on him, depended on him. Besides, he had built the ranch up, had made it a success. It *belonged* to him. And she—wasn't needed. They could get on very nicely without her; they would scarcely miss her after a little. They would come to think of her eventually as just a visitor who had stayed out the term of her visit and then had gone.

Mrs. Readman was staring at her with grieved, incredulous eyes.

"Home?" she protested gently. "But this is your home, my dear!"

"No," answered Constance gravely. "It would have been, of course, if Tommy had lived. But he didn't; and Jack has taken the place over so that it is really his home now—and yours, of course—but not really mine."

"But, my dear—" protested the old lady.

"Anyway," went on Constance, interrupting, "it isn't that I don't feel welcome here. You have both been dear, sweet, wonderful to me always. But, you see, the life here isn't the life I've always lived—the life I'm really used to. It fascinated me for a time, because it was different—a novelty. And maybe—if Tommy had lived to share it with me—I might have been contented here always. But I've been getting restless lately. The monotony has got on my nerves.

"I've been longing to get back to my own world, to my friends, to the interests and occupations that were mine before. And my mother has always wanted me to come home. So—so I'm going."

Mrs. Readman studied her with wistful, sorry eyes.

"I see," she said. "I thought you were happy here. But you're young, of course—and I can well understand that you miss the excitement, the gayety, that young people seem to enjoy. I'm sorry—but I understand. Only I thought—I hoped—that you—I mean that Jack—But there, that doesn't matter. I hope you'll not go out of our lives completely, my dear. I've always felt like a mother to you, too—from the very first. And my heart has kind of twined around you some way. You'll come back, won't you, some day?"

"Yes," said Constance, "of course I'll come back."

But it was a lie; she meant never to come back. And so they kissed and parted.

When Jack rode in toward noon she was gone.

And she had not even left a note for him saying good-by!

XII.

HER mother received her gladly, ready to forget her former folly and stubbornness. Her old friends flocked around her as soon as they heard she was back, eager to help her forget her tragic love affair.

They found her changed, sadder, more serious, more poised; but they had expected this, and they were compelled to admit that it did not alter her loveliness. She was, in fact, lovelier than ever, when she

blossomed forth again in the most gorgeous clothes and jewels that money could buy—gifts showered upon her by her devoted parents.

So Constance Readman reentered the society that Constance Trent had spurned, and it rallied round her loyally. But all the gayety about her was like ashes on her lips. She loved Jack Wayne; she wanted Jack Wayne! She yearned for him; the rest meant nothing.

Her mother, distressed at the listlessness that Constance could not always hide, talked things over with her husband, and they decided that Constance must be taken abroad for a change. New scenes—new people. That was what she needed; she must be made to forget.

Constance yielded to the plan without argument, and her mother began to make arrangements. But Constance took no interest. She did not care.

Meanwhile, back on the ranch, Jack missed her terribly, and found the joy gone out of life, despite his ever increasing success, because *she* was not there to work and plan for him. And Mrs. Readman, who missed her sorely too, soon guessed how it was with Jack, and pondered the matter for a long time, trying to decide what was best to be done.

And one day she informed him that she had to drive into town to do a little shopping.

"It's a long way for me to go," she admitted, "but I feel I must—and I'd not mind it nearly so much if you went, too. Do you suppose you could manage it?"

"Why, of course, if you want me to," he answered simply.

And in no time whatever he had the car out—a new car, quite an expensive one, designed exclusively for her use—and he drove it himself to make sure of missing all the bumps.

So they drove to the Trent house, Jack never guessing whose house it was, contenting himself with the explanation that Mrs. Readman gave him—that she was seizing the opportunity to visit an old friend.

She asked him if he would mind waiting in the car just a minute or two; and while

he sat there, never dreaming what was in the wind, Mrs. Readman was facing Constance.

"My dear," she cried as the girl advanced warmly and took her in her arms, "I had to come. I simply couldn't stand it any longer. There were things I felt I had to say to you—though maybe when I've said them you'll hate me. I have to risk that."

"Why, nonsense, Mother Readman! That's absolute nonsense!" she cried.

"Listen," said the old lady, sinking into the chair that Constance led her to and gazing straight down into the eyes of the girl who crouched on the stool at her feet. "My dear, I loved my son."

"I know you did," breathed Constance gently.

"I loved him," went on the old lady, "because he was my son, not because he deserved to be loved or admired or respected. He was never a good son to me—never! And I am afraid he was never a good man. He married you for his own selfish reasons, meaning to use your father's wealth and influence for his own advancement."

"Mrs. Readman!" cried Constance, horrified, shrinking back.

"This may sound almost sacrilegious to you," said the old lady, "but it's Gospel truth. Jack knows it. I let him know it. I let him have all of Tommy's letters and papers at the first, so that he could see—that he had *not* cut off a good man in the flower of his youth that night when the cars crashed. Rather, I think, the hand of God was in it—to prevent my Tommy from doing you a cruel wrong—to put an end to his evil doings—and maybe—give him another chance to do right—another time—another way."

"I don't feel I'm betraying him in telling you all this. I feel he'd want you to know—now! That he'd realize you deserve to be freed from any feeling of loyalty you have for him. Because he didn't deserve it, and where he is now—understanding things better, perhaps—he'd want to be fair to you."

There were tears in Mrs. Readman's eyes now—tears in Constance's eyes as she stood

there, trembling, realizing what it must have cost Tommy's mother to say all this; realizing that if it was true, as it must be, as it must surely be, she was free—absolved from any further bonds—*free*—to love any one that she choose. *Any one!*

"If you want proof," said the little woman grimly, as Constance said nothing, "here are some of Tommy's letters—"

But Constance waved them away.

"Oh, no," she cried. "Why should I doubt *you*?"

"And you don't—hate me—for shattering your illusions?" asked Tommy's mother wistfully.

"No—of course I don't hate you. I'm *grateful*."

"I felt I *had* to tell you, to—to break the hold he had on you. I had no peace of mind otherwise—feeling that he was keeping you from being happy. And I thought—you never know—maybe things might be

easier for *him*—if there wasn't that against him, too."

Constance nodded. The old lady dried her eyes.

"Well," she said, "that's all. I came to tell you, and I've told you. Now I'll go—unless—unless you'd like a word with Jack first. He's driving me, you know. And he's out there in the car now, waiting. But he doesn't know what I came for, nor even whose house this is."

"*Jack's—out there?*" gasped Constance.

She ran to the window to make sure, and saw him waiting patiently in the driver's seat of the new car; then she rang the bell violently for the butler and sent him out in haste to ask the gentleman to step in.

Puzzled, curious, a little anxious because of the butler's rather dazed air, Jack obeyed the summons—to find Constance waiting with outstretched arms, the light of love in her eyes.

THE END



APOLOGIA

(*To an irate damsel*)

SWEET, when to put my arm around your waist
I feeleed inclined,
Pray, chide not! (since said waist elusive is
And hard to find)—
Neither with most uncalled for anger rankle,
If, by mistake, I have embraced your ankle!

'Tis not my fault, because a woman's belt
One minute slips
Up to her arms, and then—next week descends
Below her hips!
A swain misled by fashion's fool decrees,
Oft finds he's clasped his fair one 'round her knees!

Then, scold me not for seeming over-bold!
The stars above
Feel no more worship for their moon, than I
For you, my love!
But, if waists shift o'er night, from knees to neck,
A man takes chances when he hugs, by heck!

Mazie V. Caruthers.



Where Some Men Are Men

By **GEORGE F. WORTS**

Author of "Out Where the Worst Begins," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

PATRICIA GAILEN, high-spirited Eastern beauty, is heiress to a gold mine near the water tank town of Horseblanket in the Far West. An extremely bad man, One-Shot Snacker, seizes the property. The girl goes West to oust this villain. Her lackadaisical, penniless brother, Henry, trails her several hundred miles in a taxicab, but she refuses to pay his bills. Nettie Jarvis, a Western beauty, is a prospector's daughter. She and her granddad, Pa Jarvis, hotelkeeper, grubstake Henry and then horrify him with their plan of arising at 5 A.M. to wash gravel. Patricia Gailen hires Pa Jarvis to protect her from any enemy. She also engages Hamilton Clay Abney, local lawyer and saloonist, as her attorney. Miss Gailen demands a killer to polish off One-Shot Snacker. There are three utterly fearless gunmen in the town—Loupo the Wolf, Jack the Jumper, and Cockeye. Attorney Abney summons Cockeye to do his stuff.

CHAPTER XI.

“WHO’LL KILL SNACKER?”

PA JARVIS, listening with enraptured ears outside the door of the Mark Twain room while Miss Patricia Gailen interviewed and hired Hamilton Clay Abney, stepped prudently and nimbly into the shadows of the hall when the door opened and the lawyer dazedly emerged.

Pa, still tingling to Miss Gailen's thrilling demand for a killer—"a man who will shoot to kill"—seized Mr. Abney's arm so

fiercely that the lawyer squeaked with fright.

“Where's that money?” Pa whispered.

“What money?” Mr. Abney gasped.

“The hundred and fifty buck fee she just give you. A third of that's mine, Ham, and don't ya fergit it! I'll take it now. I know jest how slick you lawyers are!”

In the darkness a crisp fifty-dollar bill changed hands.

“Now,” said Pa in more relaxed tones, as they proceeded down the stairs, “you set down yere and try to collect yore wits.

I never in all my life heard a man talk so flabby as you did to that gal. Don't you realize, ya pore fish, that we got a gold mine in that gal? It's goin' to cost her money to see the insides of the Bluebird mine, and I'm a goin' to git my share—sabe? Now, you set down yere while I go git Cockeye." He raised his voice slightly: "Hey, you, Cockeye—you flea infested maverick!"

A shapeless bulk arose from the porch steps and was momentarily silhouetted against the lower field of stars.

"Whut ya want, Pa?" Cockeye called in return.

"Come yere."

Cockeye stumbled into the dark hall. Pa grasped him firmly by the elbow.

"That gal upstairs wants to give ya a job."

"Me?" Cockeye gasped.

"She wants a desp'rit man."

"Well, I ain't no desp'rit man, Pa."

"Ya better git desp'rit, Cockeye, and right soon," Pa advised him in a ferocious whisper. "Ain't ya got a record of bein' the toughest one-gun man in the hull of Dirty Water County? Ain't ya got a reputation of bein' the quickest man on the draw this side of Cheyenne? Ain't ya *noted* fer bein' a bad man?"

"Whut's that got to do with it, Pa?"

"She wants to hire a man who c'n shoot t' kill!"

"Shore enough?"

"I'm a tellin' ya! Now, I've got everything fixed fer ya, Cockeye. Agree to do whut she tells ya, no matter whut she asks. And when she says, 'Cockeye, how much c'n I hire ya fer?' ya speak right up and say, 'Ma'am, a real tough bad man like me comes high. It's a goin' to cost ya one hundred and fifty iron men a month, ma'am."

"Great grief, Pa—that's a hull lot o' money!" Cockeye protested.

"Do whut I tell ya," Pa growled. "Of coss, it's a hull lot of money. Remember, I'm a runnin' this show, son. I'll advise ya; I'll perfect ya. And I'm a goin' to charge ya a nominal fee—jest the ordinary agent's commission—thutty-three and a third per cent. Out of the hundred and fifty, I collect fifty, payable in advance, Cockeye.

Now, trot along up there and say, 'Yes, ma'am, it will give me great pleasure,' to whutever she tells ya. Scoot along, son."

Cockeye gingerly climbed the stairs and gingerly rapped on the door of the famous Mark Twain room.

A crisp feminine voice bade him enter.

Miss Gailen examined Cockeye critically. Certainly his appearance justified all that Hamilton Clay Abney had said of him. He was fat and bowlegged—the type of fat man which has led some shrewd observer to remark that fat men are the more dangerous of their species.

His round, tough face was sunbaked to a leathery brown; his eyes were black, piercingly so, one of them pointing upward and outward. It was difficult to say at any time just where Cockeye was looking; but it was easy, by the same token, to realize that his nickname had been selected wisely. Cockeye fitted him. He looked tough; he looked like a mighty bad, bad man.

"You're the gentleman Mr. Abney was speaking about?" Miss Gailen asked in businesslike tones.

"I don't know if I'm the gent that Ham Abney was speakin' about," Cockeye returned with an uneasy glance that seemed to be directed toward a knot hole in the ceiling, "but if yo're a lookin' fer a man named Cockeye, that's me, ma'am."

Miss Gailen looked at him questioningly; and Cockeye became uneasy.

"Have you ever shot a man, Mr. Cockeye?"

His face brightened. "Oh, shore, ma'am. Many's the man I've shot. Skassly a year passes but whut I don't shoot some man, fer some reason or other. But my name ain't Mr. Cockeye, ma'am. It's jest plain Cockeye, to friend and foe alike."

The girl nodded. "I see. Have you shot this year's man yet, Cockeye?"

"No, ma'am, I ain't; not yit."

"Would you like to have the opportunity to keep up your unblemished record?"

"Whut, ma'am?"

"Would you like to undertake to shoot a man for me, if necessary—and earn a nice bit of tobacco money into the bargain?"

Cockeye recalled Pa Jarvis's parting injunction.

"My fee, ma'am, fer them sort of services, is a hundred and fifty, payable in advance. Is that satisfactory to ya?"

"Oh, it's quite reasonable. I suppose that's your odd-lot price?"

"My whut, ma'am?"

"I mean, you might quote me a discount in lots of a dozen or more."

"No, ma'am; I wouldn't care to make no reductions for quantity. Killin' a man is hard work; and killin' twelve men is jest twelve times as hard. Now, who was this low-down, white-livered scoundrel you was studyin' to have me measure up fer the leetle old wood kimony?"

"His name," Miss Gailen said, "is Snacker."

Cockeye backed hastily against the wall, his unmanageable eye leaping wildly from object to object in the room.

"Ya don't mean One-Shot Snacker, the boss up to the old Bluebird mine, ma'am?" he gasped out.

"That's the man."

Cockeye shook his head vehemently. "No, ma'am, not me. I cain't do it. I thought ya was wantin' me to bump off some of the scum around Horseblanket. I thought mebbe ya might mean that little old foxy grampa who runs this yere tavern — who right now is listenin' to all we say jest outside that there door, ma'am. I'd gladly kill him off fer ye fer—fer half price ma'am. But not One-Shot Snacker."

Miss Gailen was listening with an expression of growing scorn.

"You're afraid of Snacker!" she snapped.

Cockeye wiped his hands wretchedly together.

"It ain't that, ma'am. No, I ain't afraid of Snacker. The man don't draw breath that Cockeye, the terror of the range, is a-scairt of. It—it's somethin' else. It's somethin' I'm pledged and sworn and duty bound not to whisper to a soul. But it ain't got nothin' to do with Snacker. I'm reel sorry, ma'am, but I cain't handle this job fer ya."

Miss Gailen considered him for a moment in silence; and Cockeye wriggled under the contempt manifested in those large, dewy violet-blue eyes. His shame caused

his saddle-leather complexion to turn a blis-
tery red.

"Very well," she said crisply. "Perhaps you can find me some man who is just as brave and fearless as you are, but who is not pledged and sworn and duty bound. Can you?"

Cockeye perceptibly brightened. His sigh was a gusty one of heartfelt relief.

"I'm plumb sartain I can, ma'am. The ideel man fer yer job is Loupo the Wolf. He's jest itchin' fer a killin' bee. And his rates are right reasonable, too."

"Will you find him for me?"

"Shore, ma'am, I'll send Loupo up yere a-jumpin'."

He hastened to the door.

"And Cockeye—"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"It is understood, of course, that what we have just said is to be held in the strictest confidence?"

"I give ya my word, ma'am; and when my mouth goes shet on a thing, a full-bodied, healthy clam is as secretive as one of these yere radio broadcastin' stations, ma'am, by comparison."

"Thank you, Cockeye; now please hurry and tell Loupo the Wolf I should like to interview him at his earliest convenience."

Cockeye departed. Outside the door, a large hand, trembling with rage, seized him by the arm, and a voice quivering with fury whispered in his ear:

"Oh, ya lunkhead! Oh, ya saphead! To let a hundred and fifty cartwheels go a-slippin' through yore fingers thataway! Ya ain't got the sense of a new-laid egg. Ya'll measure me fer a wood kimony fer half price, will ya? I'm a leetle old foxy grampa, be I? After all I've done fer ya—ya ought to be sheep-dipped! Yo're so yella I can see ya shinin' in the dark!"

Cockeye took the flight of stairs in four gargantuan strides.

"Hey, you, Loupo! Where ya be?"

A tall, lanky form unfolded itself from the porch steps. A whisper issued from the sinister figure of Loupo the Wolf:

"Who's callin' my name?"

"The gal upstairs wants to give ya a job. Hustle up and grab it."

In the darkness Loupo's gasp was an

index to what his expression must have been.

"Patsy wants to see me? Ya shore 'bout that?"

"She jest now told me to send ya up a-jumpin'."

"So!" Loupo growled genially. "The leetle lady wants to give old Loupo a job. Well, all I c'n say, gents, is that she shore knows where to go when she's a-lookin' fer a *man*. Jest whut is this job?"

"I cain't tell ya," Cockeye replied. "She done sealed my lips with an oath of secrecy."

"You git out of here, you Cockeye!" Pa Jarvis said wrathfully. "Loupo, come over yere, son. I'll tell ya whut I can. The little gal wants to hire a reel he-man. I sent up Cockeye, and he welched."

"Jest like Loupo's goin' to welch," Cockeye spoke up in injured tones.

"Loupo will follow that leetle lady to the death," Loupo retorted proudly. "Now, Pa, speed it up. I'm a-cravin' to see whut Patsy wants o' me."

Pa explained. "When she asks you whut figger ya'll go to work fer her fer, speak right up glib and say: 'My figger to you is a hundred and fifty dollars, ma'am.'"

"Hold on, Pa; that's one whoppin' pile o' money."

"Shore it is, and she c'n easy afford to pay it. I'm a-managin' this thing, Loupo; I'm goin' to see that you here boys o' mine git all whut's gittable. Nachally, I have somethin' comin'. That's fair enough, ain't it?"

"Shore, Pa; shore."

"And all I'm goin' to charge ya, Loupo, is the usual agent's commission—jest a triflin' thutty-three and a third per cent. Collect yer hundred and fifty in advance. I'll jest be waitin' outside fer my fifty. Couldn't nothin' be simpler."

"Shore, Pa; I'll slip ya yore fifty."

He leaped up the stairs and knocked. Miss Gailen threw open the door and looked at him. She raised her hand as he started to come in.

"Wait just a minute," she said curtly. "Are you Loupo the Wolf? You'll have to pardon me for getting your names so confused."

"Yes, ma'am," Loupo said with a gallant bow, "and at yore service, ma'am."

"Is there anything in the world," she asked, "that you are afraid of, Loupo?"

"Ma'am, the thing ain't yet been created that I'm afeared of."

"You aren't bound by any oaths of secrecy?"

"Oh, no, ma'am—none whut would affect any dealin's I have with you."

"Very well; come in."

She disposed herself so that the kerosene lamp on the dresser filled Loupo's lean, tanned face with radiance. She inspected him thoroughly. He, too, was a tough-looking customer—with a face from which any intelligent child might be excused for running screaming to its mother. His eyes were of a smoky and dangerous gray; a sinister walrus mustache drooped about his mouth; and his mouth was filled with jagged, tobacco-stained fangs. A bad man. A bad, bad man.

"Briefly," said Miss Gailen, "I need a man with a heart of iron and nerves of steel. He must be willing, if need be, to kill. Are you that man?"

"That describes me, ma'am, right down to my heels."

"I do not know that it will be absolutely necessary to kill this scoundrel," Miss Gailen proceeded. "He is at present occupying property that is mine by legal right. He defies me to drive him off. The job of driving him off, of killing him if he will not get off, is yours if you will take it. And the name of the man is Snacker. He is the foreman of—"

Loupo hastily relaxed.

"Not One-Shot Snacker, up to the old Bluebird mine, ma'am?" he gasped.

"That's the man, Loupo!"

"But I cain't go up there and kill off One-Shot Snacker, ma'am," Loupo protested. "I thought ya meant to kill off some of this yere low-down trash around Horseblanket. I—why, I cain't get away to go off up to th' Bluebird mine, ma'am. I shore do want to be obligin'. But I cain't. I jest cain't."

"Why can't you?" Miss Gailen snorted contemptuously. "Have you pressing engagements that interfere?"

"Yes, ma'am; that's jest about the size of it. But I'll tell you whut, ma'am," Loupo went on eagerly. "I c'n git you jest the man ya want. Shall I send him up to ya? This hombre I have in mind won't hesitate at nothin'. He's a killer—a real killer. I'm shore he's a better man fer the job than I'd be. I'll go fetch him."

"Who is he?"

"Jack the Jumper, ma'am; and Jack he's jest a-thirstin' fer a killin'. And whut's more, he's got a gredge ag'in' this man Snacker. Oh, Jack's yore man, ma'am."

Miss Gailen sighed wearily.

"Very well," she said in a tired little voice. "Tell Jack the Giant Killer to run up. I—I must say I'm disappointed in you Westerners."

"Oh, ya won't be disapp'nted in Jack. I'll call him, ma'am."

Loupo strode to the nearest window and threw it open.

"Hi—Jack! Ya down there, Jackie?"

A voice rose thinly on the night.

"Who? Me? Shore I'm down yere."

"Come right up, Jack. The leetle lady yere wants to see ya."

Loupo turned back to Miss Gailen with a kindly smile.

"Oh, Jack is yore man, ma'am. He'll kill Snacker fer ya."

"Oh, I do hope so!" Miss Gailen sighed.

There was a step on the stair. Jack the Jumper, with a puzzled look on his seamed, wizened little face, entered. Jack was older than the other members of the bad triumvirate; and he possessed, perhaps for that reason, a seasoned look of badness that the others lacked.

He was short, thin, and leathery. A livid white scar ran from left earlobe to eyebrow. His nose was broken, and it gave to his face the illusion of constantly preparing to turn to the right. His little brown eyes were hostile, shifty. He looked mean. He looked capable of the lowest rascality.

Entering, Jack the Jumper said nothing. He merely asked questions with his eyes; for he was a follower of the older trails, a native of the older West, where men were shortspoken and the quiver of an eyelash meant more than could be compressed into many volumes.

"Is your name Jack the Jumper?" the girl asked.

A nod.

"Do you consider yourself a brave man?"

Another nod.

"Have you ever killed a man?"

The eyebrow above Jack the Jumper's left eye quivered slightly. He gave no other sign. The men of the old West were cautious about answering such questions.

"Would you be afraid of killing a man now?"

"Who?"

"He is a man who has done me a great injustice. He is illegally occupying property that is mine. I want him driven off—killed, if necessary. His name is Snacker."

"Not me," said Jack.

"Why not?" Miss Gailen gasped.

"I'm not yore man."

"Are you afraid of Snacker?"

"Nope."

"I'm willing to pay you a fair price."

"How much?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Ain't interested."

Jack the Jumper turned to go. But Miss Gailen quickly blocked the doorway. Her eyes were blazing. Her face was white, as white as the scar that ran from Jack the Jumper's left earlobe to eyebrow. And her small fists were clenched at her sides.

"Loupo!" she snapped.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Go to the window and call Cockeye."

"Shore thing, ma'am."

Loupo went to the window with alacrity and called.

Cockeye promptly answered. He came upstairs three at a bound.

"Shut that door," Miss Gailen ordered when he had entered.

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE SOME MEN ARE MEN.

"Now," she said angrily, when Cockeye had obeyed her command, "I want you three desperadoes to line up there against that wall. On the jump—all of you!"

The three bad men hastily exchanged uneasy glances, then did as they were told. They lined up against the pine wall, in ascending order from left to right—first Cockeye, who was the smallest, next Jack the Jumper, and finally Loupo the Wolf. Three pairs of eyes looked at her anxiously.

“Don’t move,” said the girl sharply. “I want an explanation of all this hesitation you three have shown. I came into this town this afternoon—a stranger—a girl—hoping that I could find some man big enough, brave enough, manly enough, to right a grievous wrong. I came with the impression that this was the great West, where men are men, where a woman’s rights were defended to the last drop of a man’s blood.

“What do I find? Men—yes—who look brave, but who are great hulking cowards. That’s what you are—all of you! Cowards! You’re yellow! And this is the country where men are men!”

She threw back her head and laughed mirthlessly.

“Where *some* men are men! All I can say is that I haven’t found *one* so far. Don’t move—you, Loupo—I’ve only just begun. Now answer my questions and tell me the truth. Are you men making fun of me—are you taking advantage of a girl’s ignorance? Jack the Jumper?”

A short head-shake.

“Cockeye?”

“No, ma’am, we ain’t—on our word of honor.”

“Loupo?”

“Good Gawd, no, ma’am!” Loupo blurted.

She stared at them with fresh exasperation.

“Well, then, what in the world is the matter? Are you cowards?”

“No, ma’am!”

“Then kindly explain to me why you refuse to help me.”

The bad men exchanged more glances.

Lupo spoke.

“We’re under oath, ma’am, not to breathe it to a soul.”

“The fact is, ma’am,” Cockeye took up, “that nary one of us c’n leave Horse-blanket fer as long as it’d take to go up

to th’ Bluebird and shoot up Snacker. That’s all.”

She glared at Jack the Jumper. “Is that true?”

He nodded.

“Go on,” Miss Gailen encouraged them.

The three bad men appeared to squirm.

“Shall we break our oath and tell her?” Cockeye whispered.

“I’m fer comin’ clean with the leetle lady,” Loupo said boldly. “How ‘bout you, Jack?”

“Spill ‘em,” said the shortspoken one.

“Well, now, it’s like this, ma’am,” Cockeye proceeded. “Ya see, us three men has got a contrack with the railroad.”

“A contract!”

“Yes, ma’am—a contrack duly signed, sealed, and executed. Accordin’ to the terms of this yere instrument, we got to be on hand every evenin’ when the Yeller Flyer pulls in. We got to be down there to do our stuff.”

“We’re railroad bad men,” Loupo elucidated.

“Railroad bad men!” the girl exclaimed.

“That’s it, ma’am.”

“But—but I thought you were real bad men!”

“Yes, ma’am—we were. But business got so slack we had to fall back on a respectable way o’ makin’ a livin’. So we hired out to th’ P. and W. We’re under bond to be down to the depot when the Yeller Flyer pulls in fer water—so’s the passengers c’n see whut real Western bad men look like.”

“We get a regular monthly salary,” Cockeye took up the burden of the explanation, “and we git docked if we ain’t on the job, and we git sartain bonuses fer sartain things.”

“Ya see, ma’am,” Loupo broke in eagerly, “the station master keeps a record on us. He’s got a cyard in his safe, all ruled off and lettered with our names; and every day we work we get a cross checked in opposite our names. I ain’t missed but five days in the hull two y’ars we been under contrack—and I’m docked one dollar and thutty-five cents fer every time I don’t show up.”

"But I offered you a thousand!" Miss Gailen cried.

"Yes, ma'am; but the only excuse the railroad 'll accept is our fallin' sick. We got to have a doctor's certificate to show we been sick, or we lose our jobs. If I went up to the Bluebird, now, and killed off this yere Snacker, the doctor 'd know I hadn't been sick, and I'd stand to lose my job."

"How much are you paid?"

"We git twenty-five dollars a month, ma'am, for thutty-day months; twenty-six a month fer thutty-one day months; and a dollar apiece extra fer every special."

"And we git time and a half after dark," Loupo put in.

"Why!" Miss Gailen exclaimed. "I should think you'd be willing to sacrifice a paltry twenty-five a month for the thousand I'm willing to pay. I'll pay more. I'll pay any one of you two thousand dollars!"

Lupo shook his head sadly.

"Ma'am, yore offer is shore temptin', but with us it's a matter of honor. We've done gave our sacred word to be down when the Yeller Flyer rolls in fer water; and if we jumped our contrack we wouldn't dast to show our faces again in a decent community. You see how it is now, don't ya, ma'am?"

Miss Gailen withheld judgment.

"Then there's the bonuses," Cockeye pointed out to her. "There's three o' them, all told, and the railroad distributes 'em to us at the end of every yar."

"Tell her about the grand prize contest, too," Loupo said excitedly.

"Now, jest hold yore hosses, Loupo. These yere bonuses, ma'am, are fer three sep'rate things. The fust bonus goes to the man whut's had the most awe-inspirin' appearance durin' the foregoin' yar. In other wuds, to the man whut looks most like whut a real honest-to-God bad man oughta look like. They call that one th' Picturesque Prize. Jack the Jumper won it last yar. Show the leetle lady the prize ya won last yar, Jackie."

Jack the Jumper obligingly rolled back his sleeve and exhibited a silver wrist-watch with an illuminated dial.

"Keeps puffect time," he said proudly.

"The next prize is fer the man whut has the most regular attendance durin' the foregoin' yar," Cockeye continued. "Show it to her, Loupo."

Lupo delved into an inner pocket and produced a fountain pen beautifully embellished with inlaid gold.

"Writes jest like a pencil, ma'am."

"The thud prize, ma'am," Cockeye went on, "is fer the man whut invents the most convincin' bit o' bad-man actin' and puf-foms it within view of the passengers durin' the foregoin' yar. This was my prize, ma'am. I wore it specially to-night. I only put it on on special occasions."

"What is it?" Miss Gailen gasped.

"Necktie," Jack the Jumper grunted.

"It's beautiful," the girl agreed.

"And in addition to these yere yarly bonuses," Cockeye resumed, "this fall there's goin' to be a grand prize contest. It's goin' to be held right yere in Horseblanket. All the bad men and Indians on exhibition all along the railroad 're goin' to come yere and have a contest. Th' grand prize is goin' to the one whut looks most like whut he's a-makin' himself out to be to the travelin' public. Mexican bad men ain't admitted to the contest. With them in it, us civilized bad men wouldn't stand no chance."

"Tell her about the bad men's union," Loupo burst out eagerly. "And the bad men's convention."

"Now, jest be patient, Loupo. This grand prize contest, ma'am, will be a great thing fer Horseblanket. The railroad expects to run special trains f'm both directions, and this hotel will be jam-packed. Any Indian or any prop'ly certified bad man can enter the contest. The judges are goin' to be three well-known ranchmen, one selected f'm each State. And the grand prize, ma'am, is goin' to be a silver lovin' cup. Then there's goin' to be ten other prizes, rangin' all the way f'm a full dress suit to a pair of pure silk sleeve garters."

"And after the prizes 're awarded there is goin' to be a grand popularity contest. Everybody 'll cast one vote, and see who's the most popular bad man on the hull line. Then there'll be a grand ball afterward in

the hotel dinin' room, foller'd by a barbecue.

"Gittin' around to Loupo's remark, at this grand get-together, we aim to form the bad men's union. We're goin' to band together fer higher pay and Sundays off.

"And if the grand prize and popularity contest goes off as smooth as we're hopin', next y'ar we'll hold a bad man's convention—Indians barred. Officers 'll be 'lected, and rules and regulations 'll be passed governin' the conduct of bad men gen'rally and railroad bad men in partic'ler. Fer the fust time in history, if the convention goes through, ma'am, the bad men of the great West will present a united front.

"The boys 'll be seated in the convention hall accordin' to their records. Bad men with records of ten killin's or over can sit in the fust three rows, and will be entitled to wear a blue ribbon in the coat lapel. Bad men with f'm five to nine killin's inclusive to their credit will set in the next five rows. Them are entitled to wear a maroon ribbon. And all bad men with killin's of under five will occupy the rest of the downstairs and the balc'ny. They don't wear no ribbons at all. They rank jest as amachers.

"All bad men will have to have the records of their killin's prop'ly certified. Each killin' must be guaranteed by sworn affidavits of coroners, sheriffs or like officers o' the law.

"We're right proud to say, ma'am, that all three of us are blue-ribbon boys, although there's a cloud on the title of jest one o' mine, which I expect to clear up before the convention convenes. There was some slight misunderstandin' as to jest where the bullet had entered the corpse, and the coroner's jury whut sat on the case favored a verdict of justifiable homicide. I have a lawyer workin' on the case now, ma'am, and hope to hold a clear title to that killin' in jest a few days. I aim to be in the front row of the convention, ma'am. It's a matter of great pride with us three to set together."

"So you can see, ma'am," Loupo put in, "jest why it ain't possible fer us to help a purty leetle lady like you. We'd like to help ya kill Snacker. We shore would.

But we cain't, ma'am—not with this bad men's union a-loomin' up like it is."

There was a firm knock at the door.

Loupo opened it, and Pa Jarvis walked in.

"Pardon me, ma'am, fer appearin' to intrude," said Pa, "but I jest happened to be passin' by in the hall, and I couldn't very well miss hearin' whut was a-goin on. Whut these boys say, ma'am, I c'n vouch fer. They're all good boys, and willin'. They'd kill off Snacker fer ya in a minnit, if it wasn't fer the grand prize contest and that union matter a-loomin' up like it is. Jest be patient, ma'am; I'll find ya a man to kill Snacker. All the bad men ain't chartered yit by the railroad. Skassly a day goes by but whut some dangerous, deadly character drifts into Horseblanket."

"But the railroad might see him and hire him first!" Miss Gailen wailed.

"No, ma'am; ya c'n rest easy on that point. The railroad only does its hirin' of bad men and Indians in January."

"But how can you be sure that the kind of man I need will be drifting into town? Time is precious with me, Pa. I must have action."

"Don't worry yer little head, honey; I'll git ya action. I'll git ya a man inside o' the comin' twenty-four hours—or, by Gawd, I'll go out there myself. I ain't as sure on the trigger as I used to be; but I like ya, gal; and whut you've done told me about the deal Snacker give ya has got my old blood fairly a-boilin'. I aim to see justice done—so long as there's a drop of red blood a-flowin' in these yere old veins. Ya said ya'd pay twenty-five hundred dollars to the man whut drove Snacker outa th' Bluebird?"

"I believe I said two thousand."

"It's well wuth the extry five, gal. Killin' men ain't the easy task it was back in the days when I was fillin' graveyard after graveyard."

Miss Gailen shook her head.

Pa looked at her anxiously, but saw that she was adamant.

"Well," he said jovially, "s'posin' we jest split the diff'rence!"

"No, Pa. My limit is two thousand flat."

His blue eyes filled with hurt, but presently his benevolent old smile spread out beneath his ivory whiskers.

"It's a deal," he said vigorously. "Run along, boys. The dicker's done closed. Either I find you a man to kill Snacker inside of twenty-four hours, or I go up there and shoot the low-down scoundrel m'self!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ULTIMATE WOW.

NUMBER Forty-Three, the westbound accommodation, was a ribbon of light creeping along a shelf high in the mountains when Nettie and Henry reached the depot. Behind them Horseblanket sprawled in graceless slumber. Only one light was burning in the village, and Nettie, contemplating it with narrowed eyes, knew that Miss Patricia Gailen was busy at her scheming.

She eyed that lighted window with a malevolence alien to her nature, for in all her life Miss Jarvis had never been called upon to hate before. She could not have analyzed this hatred if she had tried. Perhaps it was based upon envy, as most hatred is. No doubt she envied Patricia her assurance, her poise, the ease with which she beguiled men into making fools of themselves. Men had loved Nettie, but she lacked the magic of turning them into fools. But most of all, Nettie hated Henry's sister for her open contempt of Henry.

She looked at Henry wistfully, and was suddenly weary of heart. Henry was unattainable. He was tired of her before he had known her two hours. Henry, in his turn, looked wistfully down the tracks toward the ribbon of light, where the toy train ran in and out among the hills, as if it would never reach Horseblanket; but at each convolution the ribbon grew brighter and larger.

An indescribable something crept into his bearing as he watched the approach of the train—something which had been lacking since Nettie had ransomed him from the taxi driver. Much of the sag had gone out of him. He carried his head higher, his shoulders farther back; there was a tense-

ness, an eagerness, about him. Occasionally there issued from his lips a soft and nervous "Phew!"

In the darkness under the overhang of the station roof an invisible horse whinnied and pawed nervously in the cinders. Near by the hot red spark of a cigarette brightened and waned.

Nettie gazed at it thoughtfully.

"That you, Baldy Peters?"

A soft "Ayop" emerged from the darkness.

"Expectin' anybody on Forty-Three?"

"Nope."

"Goin' back to th' ranch to-night?"

"Ayop."

Henry, his thoughts momentarily withdrawn from the winding ribbon, shuddered. Feature living in a country where people carried on that kind of conversation! Phew! Under cover of the darkness he grinned. Well, in just about a half hour such conversations would be forever behind him.

Maybe they would arrest him and put him to work on a road gang, as Pa Jarvis had threatened; maybe they'd kill him the way they killed the bums who rode on the rods or some way even more fiendish. Well, death was preferable to Horseblanket. Thank God those horrible mountains would soon be behind him!

He snickered softly as one of Nettie's phrases recurred to him: "There's gold in them hills." Wouldn't the gang shriek when he told them about Nettie! Sweet daddy!

The rails were humming now; a ripple of sound running down them like the ripple that precedes the incoming tide. Presently they were clicking. A bold bright eye stared from a lurching monster, invisible yet save for a gleam now and then of escaping steam.

The headlight coldly searched out the darkness under the station roof; flatly silhouetted a sleepy cow pony with drooping head and ears at weary angles; a slouching figure in chaps and woolen shirt. The light gleamed with electric blueness in the pony's nearest eye. The rails rang in an exultant song of steel resisting steel.

Forty-Three roared hotly into the sta-

tion. Compressed air whistled shrilly in escape. Comforting sound! The sound of seaport terminals, of granite and steel cities, where life was real and joyous. The whiff of stagnant steam and sour smoke was the breath of life. Civilization! Civilization, in capsule form, launching through the night, touching with its Aladdinlike magic the crudeness and rawness of Horseblanket—of a thousand Horseblankets.

Through the open windows Henry saw men asleep, men in shirt sleeves, puffy-eyed and bored with the dreariness of travel, unaware of the magic of steel and smoke that conveyed them.

Water was gushing into the tender. A pump clicked, hissed; clicked, hissed. A door clanged.

Lurid orange light glared against the station roof. A shovel grated against steel. A tired man bellowed:

“Bo-o-o-ard!”

The whistle tooted. Couplings rattled. *Chf—chf—chf—chf—chf—chf*!

Nettie sighed and turned to Henry. Henry, with neck protruding, was gazing at the moving windows as at a lost paradise. Cabarets! All-night jazz palaces! Fleets of yelping taxis! Scent of powder and rouge and synthetic gin! The voodoo lure of drums! Willowy dancers!

He was trembling. Impulsively he started forward. It was all within reach—he had only to spring to that moving platform. But the worm within him had turned; he had given his word, had pledged himself to six months of loyalty.

Nettie's voice, tired, miserable, inquired:

“Do you really want to get away from me so much? Don't you like me at all? Isn't there *anything* about me you like, Henry?”

He turned to her. A sad smile flickered at Henry's lips. One thing Henry would not deliberately do, despite his numerous shortcomings, was to hurt the feelings of a pretty girl.

“Like you?” he gasped. “Why, Nettie, you—you're the ultimate wow! You're the queen of your sex! But look here, Nettie, are you going to make me get up at five o'clock? You won't, will you?” he pleaded,

and his voice, the expression on his face, would have wrung pity from an old-time Cossack.

Nettie relented. Within certain limits, she would always be putty in Henry's hands. He had only to plead with her, and she would, within certain limits, give in to him.

She gazed at him adoringly.

“I'll give in,” she said impulsively, “this once. I'll leave a note fer Pa not to call you till five thirty.”

CHAPTER XIV.

NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET.

NETTIE, having delivered Henry at the threshold of room 15, proceeded down the hall toward her own room. Under the crack of the door at the end of the hall light was shining. Nettie hesitated; and as she hesitated, the door opened a few inches, a pair of violet eyes studied her for a moment, and the door was opened the rest of the way.

Nettie's face hardened and the light of battle glowed in her eyes.

Miss Gailen smiled softly.

“Won't you come in? I'd like awfully to have a talk with you.”

Nettie nodded stiffly and strode into the Mark Twain room. With this room she was intimately familiar: the diagonal crack across the lower pane of the middle window; the knothole where the knot had dropped out of a floorboard before the dresser; the blind spot in the upper right-hand corner of the watery mirror; the block of wood under the leg of the bed from which the caster was missing—all these were old acquaintances.

But as she entered the room now her nostrils quivered to a sense of strangeness. Ineffable though the change was, she marked it, and, in the same breath, resented it.

A fragrance, some exotic and subtle perfume, tinted the air of the room; and littered about it were the paraphernalia of a woman who obviously did not, in the purchase of any desirable thing, have to consider the cost.

On the bureau was an array of ivory-and-gold toilet articles, and in the midst of these a round box done up in gilt foil containing an ashy pink powder, while ranged under the mirror were cut-glass bottles and phials.

Nettie's sniff, as her sharp, roving eyes encountered a pair of ethereal golden stockings trailing from a chair the cane bottom of which depended by a few loyal fibers, was one of contempt, as was also her grunt as her eyes, ranging onward, lost themselves in the luxurious intricacies of a wardrobe trunk, opened and revealing the nicety of the dress hangers.

Nettie was determined to resent anything belonging to Miss Patricia Gailen; for Miss Patricia Gailen had thrown down the glove, and Nettie had accepted the challenge. The fact that Miss Gailen was not aware that she had thrown down the glove did not alter the circumstances. She was, from the very nature of things, Nettie's enemy, and so far as Nettie was concerned, she would continue in that rôle until Nettie had humbled her.

Miss Gailen, vast as had been her experience with women, did not understand Nettie. That this blunt-spoken, golden-haired Western girl bitterly disliked her, she had accepted as an unpleasant fact; and she was determined that the misunderstanding be corrected without further delay.

Nations went to war over misunderstandings less reasonable than the unprovoked distrust which Nettie was fostering; and while Miss Gailen was preparing to deal with the problem intellectually, Nettie was fanning the embers of her emotions. It was to be a battle without quarter.

Miss Gailen fired the opening shot by smiling graciously and asking her guest to be seated. Nettie, accepting the invitation, protected herself from flank attacks by laying about her a barrage of glares. With calculated rudeness, she jerked from her shirt pocket the limp bag of granular tobacco and the pad of brown paper. She rolled a cigarette with a flip of the fingers. The other girl lighted a ready-made one. Nettie inhaled fiercely; her exhalation was little less than a curse.

"It seems to me," the Eastern girl began tentatively, "that girls placed in a situation such as this, should be friends."

"I don't see why it's necessary at all," Nettie defied her. "I'm free, white and twenty-one, and I've always managed to take care of myself."

Miss Gailen promptly decided to waste no more time beating about the bush.

"Miss Jarvis, why don't you like me?"

And Nettie, without a second's hesitation, replied: "Because you treat yore brother like a dog."

Miss Gailen studied her thoughtfully. "Do you think that's fair to me? You haven't heard my side of it."

"I don't need to know yore side of it. There ain't but one side of it, so fur's I'm concerned. Any gal with all the money you've got who lets a perfect stranger step up and save her brother from gettin' beat up, can't make me see her side of it, no matter how much explainin' she does. But, of course, I'll listen if you want to try."

Miss Gailen shook her head.

"I don't believe anything can be gained by my trying, and I'm sorry you're so determined that we can't be friends. There is no reason why we shouldn't be friends. I've never known a girl quite like you before, and I'm sure I could admire you very much—if you'd let me."

"I don't think we talk the same language," Nettie said grimly.

Miss Gailen sighed. "Perhaps not. I suppose I am as much a puzzle to you as you are to me. Let's get back to Henry. He seems to be the bone of contention. Until just a few hours ago, I had given Henry up as lost. I did not believe it was possible that anything could be done to save him."

"From whut?"

"Himself."

"Huh! If there's anything wrong with Henry, which I can't see myself that there is, why didn't you try to cure it yoreself? You had plenty chances."

"That's what I was coming to. There has never been an opportunity before. Henry's like quicksilver—always eluding your grasp. Back home, he could always escape; but it's difficult, almost impossible,

for him to escape here. It's the first opportunity that any one has had to help Henry as he should be helped—if he is ever to make a man of himself.

"From what I gathered, you are going to make him work—make him do hard manual labor. It's the most wonderful thing that could happen to him. He'll have a different understanding of life when you have finished with him—if you have the courage to stick it out."

Miss Gailen smiled. "That's what I wanted to tell you, Miss Jarvis—how delighted I am that you have seen his weakness and are determined to correct it."

Nettie shook her head. "I don't get you at all," she muttered. "Whut's the matter with Henry? Why, he's all right. There's nothin' the matter with him. You talk as if I'm goin' to cure him of somethin'."

"You mean," Miss Gailen breathed "that you think Henry is—perfect?"

"He looks all right to me!"

"Have you talked with him?"

"Fur purty near two hours!"

"Did he tell you about father's will and how I stopped his allowance?"

"He told me everything. Henry's all right."

"I'm so glad you like him, Miss Jarvis!"

"I like him better than any man I ever met! Henry's an elegant boy."

"And you're going to make him work for you—work hard—long hours?"

"I reckon I am," Nettie said defiantly. "Whut of it?"

"Why," said Miss Gailen simply, "I don't understand it at all."

Nettie arose with another dubious head-shake. "I reckon we don't know whut we're both drivin' at. Henry and me're startin' for Splinter Creek at five thirty. I've got to get some sleep. Good night." She started for the door and, reaching this objective, turned.

"One thing," she said ominously, "I won't put up with no interferin'!"

"Oh," Miss Gailen gasped, "I wouldn't dream of interfering. You do with Henry just what you think fit. Whatever you do I know will be for the best."

"A lot you care," Nettie flung impu-

dently over her shoulder as she departed, "whut happens to that pore boy."

East and West might mingle, but they would never mix.

CHAPTER XV.

HENRY'S AWAKENING.

PATRICIA GAILEN awoke shivering, sat up and mechanically reached for the heavy brown blanket at the foot of the bed. Before retiring she had opened the three windows as well as the transom, to cleanse from the air the acrid smell of Nettie's cigarette. Some time during the night a cold wind had sprung up; the breeze flowing over her from the three windows was bitterly cold.

With the heavy brown blanket hugged about her shoulders, Miss Gailen inclined her head slightly and listened. Dim gray squares of light showed where the windows were. For a moment she heard nothing save the sleepy, far-away murmur of the river; then, somewhere within the hotel, a door slammed.

Her teeth chattered softly as another soft puff of icy wind surged about her. She had not dreamed that in a place where the days were so hot the nights could be so cold. She was sure that, if there were light enough, she could see her breath; equally sure that the water in the porcelain pitcher would be crusted over with ice.

Another door slammed. A nasal voice, raised in song, filtered through the transom.

"The railroad is finished, boys.
The cars is on the track."

Heavy boots clumped up creaking stairs. Miss Gailen, with dilating eyes, listened. The singer continued dolefully:

"The ra-a-ailroad is finished, boys
The cars is on the track."

The voice boomed out at the very door.

"Yuh may take me from mah honey.

But money will bring her ba-a-ck.

Gawd knows Ah been all around the wo-o-o-o-rld!"

Squeaking leather passed on down the hall. Silence, penetrated only by the

distant murmuring of the river, filled the Mark Twain room. Sadly the singer continued:

“Ber-ring me mah supper, boys,
Ah'll eat it done or raw—
Ber-r-ring me mah supper, boys,
Ah'll a-eat it a-done or raw,
Ah haven’t had a square me-a-eal
Since Ah left Ark-kan-saw!
Gawd knows Ah been all around the
wo-o-o-rlld!”

Miss Gailen jumped. The Waldorf Astoria shook with the vibrations of a mighty fist hammering on some thin partition.

“Nettie!” a voice roared.

A girl’s sleepy answer: “Yes, Pa; I’m dressin’. Is Henry up yet?”

“If he ain’t,” Pa answered jovially, “he will be directly.”

Again the Waldorf Astoria shook as Pa Jarvis’s mighty fists banged upon another door.

“Henry!” he roared. But to this there was no response.

“Henry!”

Miss Gailen listened attentively; but Henry did not reply. She heard Pa Jarvis muttering something under his breath, then the squeak of rusted hinges as a door was opened.

“Henry,” Pa Jarvis said sternly, “it’s five thutty. Time to git up.”

Sputtering sounds from the sleeper were followed by snarling.

Then: “Go on away and let me sleep, you old fool!”

“Who says I’m an old fool?”

“Well,” snarled Henry, “you know you’re old, and I know you’re a fool. That makes it unanimous, doesn’t it? Go on—beat it!”

Miss Gailen with eyes on the dim outlines of the transom listened. For a time she heard nothing, nothing but the murmurous voice of the Blue River.

“Are ya goin’ to git up, or ain’t ya?” she heard Pa Jarvis inquire.

And Henry’s snarl, by way of reply: “No, I’m not going to get up. Go on away and let me alone, you old fool. Now beat it. I’m going to sleep.”

There was another period of silence, and Miss Gailen pictured Pa Jarvis gazing down

with his bright blue eyes at the towsled black head of the sloth.

“Are ya dead shore and certain of that?” Pa asked.

No answer.

“Old fool, am I?”

The silence continued.

Squeaking leather returned to the hall, and the aged voice of Pa Jarvis rose again in song, but this time there was in his tones a note of joy and triumph:

“ ‘Twas on the Blueridge Mount-tens
And there Ah’ll take mah stay-and,
‘Twas on the Blueridge Mount-tens
And there Ah’ll a-take a-mah stay-and.”

The footsteps retreated briskly to the end of the hall.

“Mah rifle on mah shoul-der,
Six-shooter in mah hand—
Gawd knows Ah been all around the
wo-o-o-rlld!”

The songbird became mute. Sounds followed that puzzled the eager listener—sounds of water being poured from one receptacle into another. The squeaking boots returned to Henry’s room.

Miss Gailen gripped handfuls of bedding and held her breath.

“Henry! Hen-ray!” Pa Jarvis spoke in wheedling, almost caressing tones. “I done told you it’s time to git up, Hen-ray.”

“Go on away,” came the slug’s muffled snarl. Then waspishly: “Give me those bedclothes. Give them back to me, or—”

“Will you git up?” Pa shouted.

“No,” Henry snarled, “I won’t get up until I’m good and ready. Get out of this room, you old fool. Give me back those—”

Henry’s protest ended in a piercing scream. A man stabbed unexpectedly in the back might have proclaimed his hurt surprise in just those agonized tones.

“I-I-I-I’ll get up!” Henry chattered. “T-that w-was a d-d-d-dirty trick. I-I-I’ll g-g-g-et even w-w-with you f-f-for t-t-t-t-that!”

The indignant voice of Nettie inquired: “Pa, whut you doin’ to Henry?”

“My stars, Nettie,” the old man said in meek, injured tones, “I jest aimed to save the boy a leetle time. Ya always take a

cold shower before dressin', don't ya, Henry?"

Miss Gailen did not hear Henry's blasphemous rejoinder. She was hugging the straw-stuffed pillow in her arms, burying her nose and mouth in it and shaking the bed with her convulsions. When she could control herself she relinquished the pillow, sat up and excavated tears from her eyes with her knuckles. Low whines and mutterings from Henry's room sent her into another convulsion.

Pa Jarvis, in a sprightly old voice was now chanting:

"Let us then be up and doin',
With a heart fur any fate;
Still achievin', still pursuin',
Learn to labor and to wait."

"Pa!"

"Yes, Nettie?"

"Do they fit?"

"We-l-l—skassly, but Henry'll grow into 'em, mebbe."

Miss Gailen strained her delighted but still incredulous ears. Henry up at five thirty! Henry driven to work like a day laborer! Her original dislike for Horse-blanket was suddenly replaced by a warm, glowing affection.

Presently a new sound obtruded, a ponderous scuffling sound, as of boots being dragged across a floor—boots much too large for their wearer. Henry's mutterings continued. Then another door opened and Nettie's voice, cheery and crisp, exclaimed:

"Good mornin', everybody! Pa, have you told Henry about our proposition?"

"Not yet," said Pa. "Henry ain't give me a chance to slip a word in sidewise. Henry ain't feelin' right well, Nettie."

Miss Gailen heard a series of clicks. Nettie was commiserating.

"Where ya feelin' bad, Henry?"

"I've got a splitting headache," Henry whined. "I'm not used to getting up so early. You know, I'm not very strong."

"Oh, you'll toughen up," Nettie reassured him. "And you'll lose that headache before you've swang a shovel an hour. Pa, tell Henry about our proposition."

"Our prop'sition," said Pa, "is jest this: I'm a goin' to grubstake you and Nettie, and you and her're goin' to do th' pros-

pectin'. There's gold in them hills, Henry, and some day we're a goin' to strike it rich. When we do, we'll split it three ways; you git a third, I git a third and Nettie gits a third."

"But Nettie told me I was going to get a dollar a day," Henry protested.

"Oh, that's out," said Pa. "Yo're willin' to gamble, ain't ya? Ya'd rather be a partner than a day laborer, wouldn't ya?"

The voices retreated as Pa, Nettie and Henry went downstairs.

The three squares of light spaced equidistantly along the front wall of the Mark Twain room had brightened to heliotrope, to amber, to pink. Miss Gailen slipped her feet into satin mules, drew the rough brown blanket about her nightgown, went to the middle window, kneeled down and gave a gasp of delight.

The air was filled with a swiftly changing light. The sky was deeply, miraculously blue, and the mountains, so sharply and clearly defined against it that they might have been cut out of dark blue paper, shimmered and sparkled at their summits with the golden wash of sunrise.

Golden arrows of light were chasing the purple pools out of the valleys when Pa Jarvis emerged from behind the hotel leading two ponies, one a pinto, the other a claybank. His shock of thick white hair and his long, white beard were ruffled by the chill breeze from the desert. The daily desert gale would not begin until the sun was higher; this chill current was only the expiring breath of night.

Nettie and a man stepped out from the porch, and Miss Gailen, leaning on the window sill, gazed down at them with keen anticipation. Nettie, in khaki shirt and skirt and black lace-boots, was familiar, but the man who accompanied her was strange—one of the strangest if not one of the funniest looking men Miss Gailen had ever beheld. She knew that the strange man must be Henry, but this was a Henry that had hitherto never been revealed to her. To be sure, his face was concealed from her by the brim of a rakish black sombrero. The band of the sombrero was decorated with tarnished silver figures in attitudes of the most curious animation.

Miss Gailen scrutinized these tarnished ornaments and finally decided that they were angels—dancing silver angels.

Viewed from the rear, as she was now privileged to view him, Henry presented a striking resemblance to a man who had at one time tipped the scales at about two hundred and eighty pounds, but who, through sickness or starvation, had wasted away to a pathetic shadow.

His pale, thin arms protruded from the voluminous rolled-up sleeves of a blue-flannel shirt designed for a giant. Corduroy breeches, supported by pale pink suspenders, seemed at no point to establish friendly relations with him. The lower legs were bunched and packed down into black riding boots ornamented like the sombrero with dancing silver angels; and Henry escorted them through the sand toward the claybank and somehow created the illusion that he was steering them. The boots did not rise and fall as their wearer progressed as ordinary footwear does; they merely dragged wide furrows through the sand.

Pa Jarvis held out the reins of the claybank pony.

"This yere's yore cayuse, Henry."

Henry reluctantly accepted the reins and appeared to be considering his mount.

"I don't even know how to get on," he complained.

"Put yore left foot in the stirrup," Nettie suggested. "No, yore *left* foot, Henry. Now jest jump up."

"I can't jump up," Henry said stubbornly.

"Pa, give him a h'ist."

Pa seized the young man by the waist and tossed him lightly into the saddle. Henry clasped the saddle horn.

"You steer him with the reins, Henry," Nettie said gently. "Take one in each hand. That's right, but don't rein him in so tight. He's got a sens'tive mouth. Pa, ya didn't fergit the lunch, did ya?"

"Plenty rations in yore saddle-bag," Pa replied. "Try workin' up above the rapids, Nettie. Say! Don't Henry set that saddle purty? If you hadn't a' told me, Henry, I'd plumb swore ya was born on a hoss. We-l-l, good luck, kids. I'll expect you back 'bout suppertime."

"Guddap," said Nettie. The ponies moved off slowly.

Miss Gailen removed her hand from her mouth. She straightened out her expression with a violent effort, although she could not banish the pinkness from her cheeks nor the dancing light from her violet-blue eyes.

"Work hard, Hennery," she called, in malicious mockery of Pa Jarvis's broad Western accents. "Don't fergit, Hennery—there's gold in them hills!"

Henry jerked his mount to a halt. He tipped back the ornamental black sombrero, turned his head and looked up. Tears of rage were in his great, dark eyes.

"It's all your fault!" he snarled. "I'll get even with you for the way you ditched me!"

His sister preserved a somber countenance. "Oh, ya'll feel better, Hennery," she called sweetly, "after you've swang a shovel a coupla hours. Don't fergit to bring back plenty o' gold—or ya prob-bly won't git no supper."

Nettie had also reined in, and the look her amber eyes dispatched to the middle window of the Mark Twain room would have ruined the California orange crop.

"Don't pay no attention to her, Henry," she said. "Guddap, yo'—lazybones!"

The ponies moved. Miss Gailen at her window and Pa Jarvis in the road below her watched them until they approached a clump of cottonwood trees. At this point Henry suddenly commenced waving his arms; and suddenly his pony wheeled and started back toward Horseblanket.

Nettie raced after him. Their voices floated through the early morning stillness.

"I don't want to," Henry snarled. "I won't!"

And Nettie's: "Aw, be sensible, Henry; come on, be sensible!"

Then: "Let me go, I tell you!"

"Where do you suppose he wants to go?" Miss Gailen called down to Pa.

"Back to bed, I reckon," Pa answered. "Henry loves his bed better'n most o' the men I know loves their wives. Was Henry always so fond of fo'teen hours sleep, ma'am?"

"He always thought sunup was the prop-

er time to retire. That's why he's so stubborn about it. You and Nettie are interfering with a long established habit."

"Net's shore a goin' to have her hands full with that maverick!"

Nettie had, by this time, recaptured her maverick. She forcibly removed the reins from Henry's hands, and Henry, after a vigorous struggle, apparently made up his mind to behave.

The two ponies again started toward Splinter Creek cañon; and Nettie was leading the claybank.

Pa looked up at the girl in the window with a bright-blue, genial stare.

"How would ya like yore aigs, ma'am—blind on one side or both?"

"No eggs with or without optical handicaps," Miss Gailen replied sweetly. "All I ever have for breakfast is coffee and toast—sliced thin."

"Thin, medium thin or extra thin?"

"If you can slice it just between medium thin and extra thin, I would be perfectly happy, Pa. Have any bad men hove into town so far to-day?"

"I skassly believe so, gal." He cocked an eye at the rising sun. "Somehow ruther, it don't look jest like a bad man's day. They usually drop in when the clouds are a pilin' up and the hull outlook looks ugly. I been studyin' some since last night, Miss Patsy, and I wouldn't be s'prised but whut we might have to jine forces with yore brother."

"My brother!"

"Yes, Miss Patsy. Looks to me like we'll have to form an expedition outa the odds and ends. So fur there's jest me. I done spoke to Ham Abney, and Ham reckons his legal activities is a goin' to be too pressin' fer him to be spared. Now, Nettie, she might lease Henry out to ya. Seems like she's got a sort of an option on the boy. Henry'd make mighty useful stop-gap."

"What do you mean—a stop-gap?" Miss Gailen inquired.

"A stop-gap fer bullets, gal. Henry c'd walk in front o' me. By the way, c'n Henry use a gun—pistol or rifle?"

"I don't believe he's ever had one in his hand in his life."

"Then he'd make a pufrect stop-gap. If a brave, courageous, fearless bad man don't drop into Horseblanket b'fore night, we'll dicker with Nettie and see if we can sublease Henry."

CHAPTER XVI.

WANTED—THE RAW OLD WEST.

THE press agent of the Pacific & Western was paid twelve thousand dollars a year because of the agility with which he flung open the door when opportunity knocked. Opportunity did not knock twice on the door of J. Eustace Ott; that gifted young publicity expert was warmly embracing her before she could lift her knuckles a second time. Sometimes opportunity did not even knock on J. Eustace Ott's door; often he sensed her presence when the ordinary man would have detected not even the whisper of her skirts.

J. Eustace Ott, to deal in still another metaphor, was a mill to which—or to whom—the unlikeliest substances were grist. Fancy, for example, his securing the three bad men at Horseblanket for purposes of publicity! Prevailing upon those three notorious characters, Loupo the Wolf, Cockeye and Jack the Jumper—to attend the daily watering of the Yellow Flier was, perhaps, not a masterstroke of press agency; but it might have been likened at least to the minor tap of a master in passing.

Perhaps the three desperadoes on exhibition did not materially influence the yearly balance sheet of the P. & W., but it must be admitted that they enhanced the good will of the corporation. The traveling public knew that bad men infested the unruly West; and to see them on display was a pleasure that they appreciated. It was a feature of the great, open spaces which they had come so many miles to gaze upon—a feature to be boasted about when they returned to the dwarfed spaces of the ill-ventilated East.

J. Eustace Ott lived and had his being in the profession—or the science—or the art—call it what you will—of publicity—publicity for the enhancement of the P. & W.'s good will. And the distinguished look-

ing young man who sat beside him in the club car as the Yellow Flier roared westward was the type of man upon whom J. Eustace Ott liked to try one of his numerous accomplishments.

Without betraying his identity, J. Eustace Ott made it a point to discuss the superiority of the P. & W. with distinguished-looking travelers—the superiority of its service, its scenery, its speed and its safety—for the publicity expert firmly believed that great oaks from little acorns grow.

The dispenser of good will was of the opinion at first that his companion was some dashing and highly prized movie star, a member of Hollywood's sacred little inner circle, commuting, as so many of them did nowadays, between Los Angeles and New York. The young man was handsome enough to be of prominence in the pictures, yet a certain aristocratic slovenliness about the prospect's clothing led him presently to doubt that he was, after all, the costly pet of some film producer.

J. Eustace Ott was a shrewd observer of details, and he liked to speculate about people—size them up before striking up an acquaintance and finding how accurate had been his guesswork. The young man who sat beside him, intensely absorbed by a continued story in a popular magazine which he held in his hands, aroused his curiosity.

J. Eustace Ott was always interested in what people read. Why did people read certain stories, articles? He often asked people why they were reading such-and-such a story. As a result, his understanding of psychology was already sufficient to justify him writing a book on the subject.

The title of the continued story that the handsome young stranger was reading with such keen interest was "The Winning of Gloria Smeed." Just why, the publicity expert wondered, was such a virile looking young man reading a story that had so obviously been written for women? Moreover, he was not reading it under the misapprehension that it was a short story, as so many innocent male readers were tricked into doing; it was definitely announced that "The Winning of Gloria Smeed" was a

continued story, and that the present installment was the most stirring that its celebrated author—Gordon Manville Stackhouse—had ever written.

The press agent sighed, as he always did when that stirring name encountered his eyes. If he, J. Eustace Ott, could only string words together as Gordon Manville Stackhouse strung them! His thoughts returned to the reader and the original tantalizing question. Why was this distinguished, virile-looking young man reading a continued story in *Wooley's Weekly* by Gordon Manville Stackhouse?

He studied the handsome stranger with intense interest. The head of the young man was, to begin with, a rarity in itself. So few heads are finely, beautifully molded when viewed from any angle. Above the ears it was high, but not too high; across the eyes it was broad, but not too broad. It rose somewhat abruptly, did not recede from bushy but orderly black brows.

The line from ear to chin was a clean, powerful sweep. The mouth in profile was crisp, clean. The nose was straight, fairly large and cleanly cut. The complexion was a smooth, darkly golden tan with an undertint of dusky red.

Here, in a word, was a *man*. His strong, lean chin spoke of decisiveness and firmness. His mouth spoke of resoluteness of character. His long upper lip proclaimed pride and dignity. His nose bespoke breeding. His forehead and his deep-set black eyes revealed a keen and judicial mentality.

And by his hair he confessed to romance. His hair was black, sweeping gleamingly back from a widow's peak and from low-running ladders beside his ears.

His suit, which J. Eustace Ott had appraised with an eye experienced in such matters, was of rough, hand-loomed brown tweed, even now odorous of heather and peat-smoke; and it had been made nowhere in the world but London. It was just the suit that a red-blooded young man should be wearing, nicely combining elegance with sloppiness.

But why, why, the good-will wizard wanted to know, was this manly, handsome stranger reading a continued story by Gordon Manville Stackhouse?

The young man, perhaps attracted by the intensity of the railroad press agent's stare, glanced up and slid his black eyes in J. Eustace Ott's direction.

The press agent shot out a nervous white hand.

"My name is J. Eustace Ott," he said cordially.

"Mine," said the handsome stranger with a slow smile as he absorbed the white hand in a large, warm, brown paw, "is Gordon Manville Stackhouse."

For a time, J. Eustace Ott could only gaze at him.

"Not Gordon Manville Stackhouse—the nov-novelist?" he stammered.

"Well, Mr. Ott, I have written a novel or two," the young man, with admirable modesty, admitted.

"Why!" exclaimed Mr. Ott tactlessly. "That's one of your own stories you're reading! I've been wondering for the last twenty miles why you were reading it."

The novelist colored slightly.

"I wanted to see how many mistakes they'd made. You know how these editors are—the dumb-bells!"

"Oh, it must be fierce," Mr. Ott sympathized, and tingled anew. Imagine sharing his belief that editors were dumb-bells with a man who knew them all by their first names! He stared at the young man with simple adoration.

"You know—if you don't mind my seeming personal—you're a whole lot younger than I thought you were."

Gordon Manville Stackhouse nodded smilingly. "Most people say that; but I'm twenty-nine."

"Well, you *are* kinda young. I'm thirty-one myself. How—how many novels have you written, Mr. Stackhouse?"

"Well, eleven have been published. I've got a few on the shelf, you see. A little too advanced for the present state of the public's mind."

"People are so damned stupid—so reactionary!" Mr. Ott gasped.

Eleven published novels! He stared at the youthful genius with fascination, and suddenly became self-conscious.

"Well, whattaya know about that! Fancy meeting Gordon Manville Stack-

house! It cert'n'y is a small world! Herc I've been wanting all my life to meet Gordon Manville Stackhouse—and you sitting in the chair beside me all morning! Whattaya know about that!"

He lowered his voice.

"I'll just tell you confidentially who I am, Mr. Stackhouse. I don't ordinarily tell it—better to travel incog. You know what I mean. I'm the publicity representative of the P. and W. I gen'rally travel along with eyes and ears open, and not sayin' much. You know. Company interests. It pays not to talk much on this kind of a job. But you're different, of course."

The novelist acquiesced with a grave smile and a slow nod.

"It's a mighty strange coincidence, Mr. Ott, because you're the one man in the world I want most to know."

Mr. Ott beamed. "You don't say so! Well, whattaya know about that! Well, what do you say we convene to my drawing-room? I've got some pre-war—"

They convened to the publicity representative's drawing-room. Seated there, eye to eye, glass to glass, J. Eustace Ott drew a long breath and asked a short question.

"D' you mind talkin' shop, Mr. Stackhouse?"

"Not a bit! I love to swap shop talk."

"Well, what I was coming to was this: Averaging it up, year in and year out, how many months in the year do you actually work?"

The novelist's black brows slid together. "About two," he said finally.

Mr. Ott sighed. "Just think of that! Would it be too personal a question to ask you how much you knock loose in a year?"

"Not at all! Glad to give you all the dope I can, Mr. Ott. Of course, my agent could give you the exact figures. Including the sale of all my rights—first American serial rights, second American serial rights, Canadian rights, motion picture rights, book rights, English rights, French rights, Hungarian rights and Finnish rights, my income averages, without dramatic rights, somewhere around eighty thousand a year."

"Good God!" Mr. Ott exclaimed. "Whattaya know about that! Well—uh—well—uh—Out here to work?"

"Yes; I have a contract with the editor of *Wooley's Weekly* to do four novels."

"You don't say so? Western novels?"

Gordon Manville Stackhouse nodded.

"Well—uh—ever been West before?"

"Never."

Mr. Ott leaned forward with gleaming eyes.

"Well, that's mighty interesting. Say, tell me something, Mr. Stackhouse. How long will it take you to write these four novels?"

"Oh, I'll knock them out in a couple of weeks apiece. Of course, if I wanted to put a lot of flowers in 'em, I could spend a little more time. But my public has had all it wants of flowery stuff. All they want is action—ninety thousand words of action, and the last chapter devoted to close-up him-and-her stuff. I mean, where he takes her little white flowerlike face in his big brawny brown hands and kisses her brutally for fifteen hundred words."

"Sure," Mr. Ott said knowingly, "I know what you mean. Him-and-her stuff. Why is it the public won't stand for art?"

"I'm blessed if I know," the novelist said wistfully. "Of course, a writer has to keep one eye peeled on the movies nowadays. That's where the big money is. And they don't want the flowers, either; nothing but action."

"Mr. Ott," he said sadly, "I'll wager I've written, in my career as a novelist, more than two hundred fight scenes, five hundred pursuits, and seven hundred and fifty thousand words exclusively of him-and-her stuff."

"It's great to have a synthetic imagination," Mr. Ott murmured.

"You mean a sympathetic imagination, don't you?" the novelist took him up somewhat coolly.

"Didn't I say sympathetic? Of course, I meant sympathetic. By the way, Mr. Stackhouse, where did you intend to lay these four new novels?"

"That's just what I wanted to ask you about, Mr. Ott."

The publicity genius gravely nodded.

"Well, I guess I'm the right man to go to. Now, what phase of the West are you particularly interested in—the primitive, unspoiled phase?"

"That's it exactly. Do you remember that famous poem—I've forgotten the name of it, but one line, or a part of a line, reads, 'Where men are men,' and the handclasp is a little something or other?"

"Sure, I know the one. Best piece of single publicity the West ever got. 'Where the skies are a little bluer, and women are a little something or other.' It's wonderful. The last line is 'That's where the West begins!'"

"Well," Gordon Manville Stackhouse said decisively, "that's where I want to go for the material for these novels."

"Sure. You want the primitive, unspoiled West. Now, lemme think."

For the next few minutes J. Eustace appeared to be thinking. His white face was screwed into an aspect of intense concentration. He shaded his eyes from all possible intrusion. Thoughtfully he twisted a lock of hair around and around his forefinger.

Even Rodin might have borrowed a constructive idea or two for a statue if he could have witnessed J. Eustace Ott as he sat there, with a lock of hair in one hand and a half finished drink of a prohibited liquid in the other.

It was all the shallowest pretense. J. Eustace Ott had finished his thinking long ago. Opportunity had knocked, and he had warmly embraced her. To reduce the facts to their simplest form:

The P. and W. had for many years cherished the hope of restoring Horseblanket to the map. Owned almost exclusively by the railroad, the land adjacent to Horseblanket lent itself admirably to the project of creating a great fashionable tourist playground. There was the desert with its romance, the Blue River with its trout, the mountains with their scenic magnificence. Four novels laid in the environs of Horseblanket would advance this project considerably.

This conclusion had been reached in the agile mind of the publicity representative very shortly after he had introduced him-

self to the famous novelist. He was applying himself now only to the details. Finally he stopped curling the lock of chestnut hair about his forefingers, unscrewed his face, unshaded his eyes.

"I know just the place you want," he announced. "Horseblanket."

The novelist looked at him blankly.

"Horseblanket? Never heard of the place."

"That's just the point," Mr. Ott said quietly. "It's unspoiled. In its heyday it was the toughest town between Denver's dead line and the Barbary Coast. Well, the old West is still there, only you have to dig down below the surface for it. Tough? Man! I'll say it's tough! There are mountains behind Horseblanket where no white man has ever penetrated. Dangerous? I'll say so! Do you ride a horse?"

"Well—I play polo," the novelist said modestly.

"Shoot a pistol?"

"Yep."

"That's good. In fact, it's almost necessary. Got plenty of rigging along?"

"Oh, sure. I always do in Rome what the Romans do. I had a big New York store outfit me from the heels up. They have a Western department, you know. Specialize in just the stuff a man will need on a trip of this kind. I've got Western boots, saddle, chaps, shirts, neck handkerchiefs, pistol—everything."

"Ammunition?" Mr. Ott sinfully inquired.

"Oh, plenty."

"You may need it—you may not. Let me see. Where was I? Oh, yes, I was just about to tell you of Horseblanket's three bad men."

"Bad men!"

"I'll say they're bad! It seems to me—yes! Their names are Loupo the Wolf, Cockeye, and Jack the Jumper. They're tough hombres. Queer thing about those fellows—uh—Gordon. They've been meeting the flyer every day now for the last two years. Rain or shine, they're down there to meet the flyer, standing around and—just looking.

"Well, that's all you *think* they're doing. Matter of fact, it's quite a story. Seems

that they're laying for a man—God only knows what he did to them. Some day he's going to step off the flyer, they say, and when he does they're going to simply riddle him with bullets—shoot him down dead in his tracks."

Gordon Manville Stackhouse was intensely interested. He was leaning forward with his powerful chin cupped in his hands, his fine black eyes fixed piercingly upon the other's. Under the intensity of that stare J. Eustace Ott wriggled slightly.

"What did he do to them?" the novelist snapped; and J. Eustace Ott realized that the intensity of Gordon Manville Stackhouse's stare was merely that of a novelist hot on the scent of useful data.

"Nobody knows," he answered. "We only know that when this man—his name is Fish, I think—"

"Fish?"

"Yes, Fish. When Fish steps off the flyer one of these days, he's a goner. Curious thing happened last fall. Fish was *on* this train. Somehow the conductor got wind of it. He knew what would happen, of course. Bullets flying—big chance of a lot of people getting shot up. That conductor showed real presence of mind, Gordon."

"The train was just slowing down for Horseblanket when he got wind that Fish was aboard. He tore through his train like a shot—the conductor, I mean. Told the engineer under no conditions to stop. And for the first time in its history the Yellow Flyer went through Horseblanket without stopping."

Gordon Manville Stackhouse brought his large brown fist down on the little mahogany table between them with a bang. "I can use that! It's great stuff! My public will eat it up."

J. Eustace Ott beamed. "Like it?"

"It's great! It's big! And it just shows you—you've got to go where the stuff happens. You couldn't invent an incident like that. You simply couldn't. Tell me some more about the three bad men."

"Well, there's mighty little more to tell—that *I* can tell," the publicity wizard said cautiously. "They're silent, reticent men, of course—all three of them. Why don't you stop off in Horseblanket and wheedle

their stories out of them? Make Horseblanket your headquarters.

"You'll never regret it, Gordon. There are gold mines up in those mountains, and back in are cattle ranches—the real stuff. And it seems to me there's a mighty pretty girl right in Horseblanket. Her grandfather runs the hotel there."

"Girls don't interest me," the novelist stated.

"I mean just as characters."

"Oh, sure, I can probably slide her in somewhere."

"Old man Jarvis runs the hotel. He's quite a character, too. They call him Pa Jarvis. Built the hotel himself back in the old days. They say he's shot twenty-eight men at different times, and God knows how many he's helped to string up. Oh, he's a real character."

"He sounds like good material, Eustace."

"Let him show you the ropes. He's just your man. And he probably wouldn't be a bit offended if you slipped him a five-spot now and then."

"Good tip, Eustace. I've found the frontier type generally is quite proud."

"Well, you'll probably have to go about it subtly with Pa Jarvis. He'd be offended, of course, if you tipped him like some servant."

"Oh, sure; I know the type."

"Be sure to have him give you the Mark Twain room. Mark Twain stopped off once in Horseblanket on his way to Virginia City, and spent a night in Pa's place. You ought to get that Mark Twain room, Gordon. Oughta be good atmosphere—memories of the old master, and all that."

"That's an idea," the novelist agreed. "I'll get the Mark Twain room and do all four novels in it."

"Good publicity," Eustace encouraged him. "Isn't a Sunday supplement editor in the country who wouldn't run a picture of Gordon Manville Stackhouse, the famous novelist, writing one of his great Western novels in the room where Mark Twain once slept?"

"Well, I hadn't thought of that."

"Oh, I didn't mean for a minute that you had, Gordon. You've got to keep your

mind on your art. But me—I'm just a publicity man, that's all."

"I'd call you a publicity *genius*, Eustace," the novelist said affectionately.

"Oh, shucks, you're the only genius in this crowd, Gordon. A chap your age with eleven novels and God knows how many moving pictures behind you!"

"Well, maybe we're both geniuses," the novelist said graciously. "How soon do we reach Horseblanket?"

Eustace consulted his watch.

"Let's see. It's one twenty-five now. We're due in Horseblanket at three forty-five. If you'll excuse me a moment, Gordon, I've got a very important telegram that must go off at the next station."

CHAPTER XVII.

PA'S NEXT VICTIM.

THE telegram that the publicity representative of the Pacific and Western dispatched was addressed to the station agent at Horseblanket, and it directed him to convey the following urgent and lengthy message to the three bad men:

Very confidential. Gordon Manville Stackhouse, the great novelist, coming to Horseblanket on *flyer* this afternoon. Be on the job and let me see you do your stuff as you never did it before. Make a special effort. Work up something good.

If I am pleased with your performance each of you will receive a handsome sterling silver self-feeding pencil. The great novelist is visiting Horseblanket to write novels of the great unspoiled West. Coöperate with him to your utmost. Give him thrills. I will be surprised and terribly hurt if you boys fail me. Go to it.

Ott.

It was this persuasive, personal touch that made J. Eustace Ott the great press agent that he was.

When the Yellow Flyer slowed pantingly to a stop in Horseblanket that afternoon there was, in the air that floated in at the open Pullman windows, a stirring, reminiscent odor—the odor of burned gunpowder. Thrilled, half-frightened passengers put their heads out of the windows and stared. A pale-blue haze floated in the atmosphere.

All the passengers saw at first was two men lounging beneath the double shadow of the station roof and their wide-brimmed felt sombreros. One glance was enough to instruct even the most uninformed Easterner that these twain were desperate characters. They slouched with hands on pistol butts. With a simultaneous motion, each of the two desperadoes produced a pad of brown papers and a limp bag of granular tobacco. With a flick of the wrist, each manufactured a cigarette. Then, in a nicely timed gesture, each exploded a match on a thumbnail.

The line of passengers at the opened windows gasped. In the deathly silence two men shook hands and said good-by. Gordon Manville Stackhouse, surrounded by luggage, saw his two trunks put off, said good-by again to J. Eustace Ott, and returned his fascinated attention to the two men lounging under the station roof a dozen yards away.

The deathly silence continued only a moment longer. Suddenly from behind the station a horseman rode. He was a short, fat man with piercing black eyes, one of which was cocked. He was covered with the dust of travel. One hand held the reins, the other rested ominously on the blue-black butt of a pistol.

At the appearance of the man on horseback the two men in the shadow of the station roof suddenly separated. They threw themselves down on their stomachs. There was a pistol in the right hand of each man. How it got there no one knew. Where a pistol had not been—presto!—there was suddenly a pistol.

The man on the horse had drawn his pistol also. The three pistols blazed away at the same instant. The Yellow Flyer tooted its whistle—began to move. Women shrieked. Still the two prone figures and the man on the horse discharged their weapons.

Suddenly the man on the horse drove spurs into the horse's belly. The horse spun about, and a man's mocking laughter floated through the air. He vanished in a cloud of tobacco smoke.

And another unwritten episode of the frontier had been concluded.

From Rattlesnake, the next station down the line, J. Eustace Ott dispatched another telegram to the station agent with directions that its contents be conveyed to the three railroad employees.

Your performance was perfect. From the bottom of my heart I congratulate you. The best sterling silver self-feeding pencils obtainable will be forwarded to you on my arrival in Los Angeles. Your boss is proud of you.

Ott.

But let us return to Gordon Manville Stackhouse. When the horseman had appeared around the end of the station, the novelist had been standing amid his hand baggage. When the first shot had been fired he had not yet moved. When the second shot was fired, he was ten yards away and rapidly gaining speed. The third shot timed him spurring around the opposite end of the station. The end of the fusillade discovered him on the front porch of Horse-blanket's leading and only hotel.

Pa Jarvis, drawn out of the kitchen by the brisk popping of the blank cartridges, was waiting on the porch to receive his newest guest.

"Are—you—Pa—Jarvis?" the young novelist panted.

"I reckon I be," the benevolent old gentleman replied.

"Well—well, does this sort of thing happen here all the time?"

"Whut sort of thing, son?"

"These—these duels."

"Oh, them? Why, they ain't nothin' to git fidgety 'bout, son. That feud's been goin' on fer y'ars, and it's been gittin' so on those boys' nerves they cain't shoot straight no more. You needn't worry yoreself at all. When the bullets begin a-flyin', jest lope over to a tree or a rock and drop down behind it till the shootin's over."

The young man smiled faintly and mopped his face with a large silk handkerchief.

"It made me rather uneasy—so unexpected, you know."

"Yes, ya looked kinda uneasy, since ya mention it," Pa agreed. "And may I be so bold as to ask whut yore name is, stranger?"

"My name," replied the other, "is Gordon Manville Stackhouse. I'm a novelist."

"Ya don't say! I had one of you writin' fellers put up with me once a long while ago. Name of Mark Twain. Mebbe ya've heard o' him."

"Yes, I've heard Mark Twain stopped here," the novelist agreed. "And I'd like very much, if possible, to use the room he slept in. I expect to write several Western novels here, and Mark Twain's old room would be an ideal place to write them."

"I'm plumb put out to disapp'nt ya, Mr. Stackhouse, but the Mark Twain room's took."

"Maybe he'd oblige me and change to another room."

"It ain't a he, stranger; it's a she."

"Well, maybe *she'd* be willing to change."

"I reckon ya'll have to speak to her 'bout that. In yore hurry to git over yere and introduce yoreself, I p'sume ya left yore baggage over t' the depot. Well, I'll take keer of it. The station agent 'll fetch it over. Let's step inside outa this glare. Jest write yore name in that book over yonder."

When Gordon Manville Stackhouse had inscribed his signature in the register, Pa said:

"I'll have your stuff chucked into room 'leven fer the time bein', Mr. Stackhouse. Set down, boy—set down."

The novelist gratefully sat down.

"Ya say yo're a novelist?"

"Yes, Mr. Jarvis."

"Ya might jest as well go on callin' me Pa. Everyone does."

"Very well, Pa. We'll make things come out even by having you call me Gordon."

"Ya're out here to write novels?" Pa asked.

"That's the idea, Pa."

"Ever been West b'fore?"

"Well, I've been through, but never stopped off."

"These yere goin' to be Western novels?"

The young man nodded.

Pa bobbed his head judicially. "Ya couldn't have come to no better place.

There ain't much of the good old West left any more, Gordon, and ya've already seen enough to know that Horseblanket's raw and unspoiled."

"I'll say it's unspoiled!"

Pa Jarvis pointed toward a green hill that could be seen through the doorway.

"Look yonder, son. Ya see that hill?"

Gordon looked. He nodded.

"Ya see that clump of little white spots jest about midway up it? Look like they might be snowflowers?"

"Yes; I see them."

"Well, they ain't snowflowers, son—they're gravestones."

"Gravestones!"

"And they ain't been there long, either. Ya may think, jest to look at me, that I'm old and senile; but I ain't so senile as I look. Them four fellers got fresh with me one night. Oh, I tell ya, Gordon, if it's the raw and unspoiled West yo're a-lookin' fer, ya c'n unpack yore writin' kit right yere!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I'LL KILL SNACKER!"

LOUP THE WOLF and Jack the Jumper had returned from the station. They were lounging in graceful attitudes on the porch. Pa Jarvis plucked the novelist's sleeve and whispered hoarsely in his ear:

"Ya see that leetle wiry, wizened-up-lookin' one with the turrible scar runnin' down f'm his left eye? That there's Jack the Jumper."

"What a quaint name!"

"Not s'loud, son; he's a dangerous character. Quickest left-handed gunman in the hull Southwest. Even the toughest bad men is scairt o' Jack the Jumper. Why? 'Cause he's a southpaw. Some o' them mebbe c'n beat him t' the gun, but that left-handed draw o' hisn contains, as ya might say, th' element o' s'prise."

"And quick on th' trigger? Phew! Boy, I've done seen that hombre plug his initials—J. J.—in a man's back before the pore feller could fall. Daid he was, son, a-walkin' in his tracks—daid before Jack had begun to carve the second J."

"Take a good look at that turrible scar. Ain't it on sightly? Tell ya how he come by that. Happened down in th' Texas Panhandle. Got into a brawl over a leetle dancin' gal whut a faro gambler was a-makin' eyes at. This yere leetle gal didn't have no pappy; and th' gambler had drug her into the gamblin' and dancin' hell he was operatin', and she went runnin' to Jack th' Jumper fer pertection. Pure, innocent leetle white flower! Well, that hellion of a gambler was on him like a flash, son. There's a situation fer one of yore novels, boy.

"Over by the faro table with his two six-guns in his hands stood this leerin' scoundrel of a gambler. And across the room was Jack th' Jumper, with the leetle gal a-clingin' to his neck; and Jack with his six-gun out, but scairt t' cut loose fer fear the gambler'd shoot fust and wing th' gal, 'cause clingin' to Jack like she was, she was makin' a nachal shield fer Jack f'm th' bullets. Now, I ask ya, if that ain't a dramatic situation!"

"Great!" the novelist breathed. "It's big stuff. What happened? Go on!"

"It happened so sudden, son, no one hardly knew whut *was* a-happenin'. The two men fired simultaneous. Both men dropped like logs—and the gal wasn't scratched. It seems they was a big heavy brass chandelier a-hangin' over Jack's head. It hung down by jest a wire.

"The gambler shot that wire, and the chandelier came a-crashin' down on pore Jack's left temple, openin' up a turrible wound. Jack's bullet had caught the gambler plumb in the heart. He jest jerked once and was still."

"What happened to the girl?"

"Now, jest be patient, son. When Jack returned to consciousness this gal was a-bendin' over him, forcin' whisky between his reluctant lips—bendin' over him like th' leetle white flower o' mercy she was. She nussed Jack back to health.

"They was a-goin' to git married, but jest the night b'fore the weddin' day they had a quarrel. Nobody knows whut it was about. Some say 'twas 'cause she was determined to go t' Niagary Falls on th' honeymoon, and he was set on Atlantic

City. But no one 'll ever know, son, for Jack's a close-mouthed man.

"Fust thing we knew they was a-quarrelin' and a-wranglin'. Then Jack smacked her one in th' jaw, which sort o' disconcerted th' gal fer a moment; then she bopped Jack one on the nose—oh, it was a purty one! Ya see how Jack's nose is all twisted off t' the left and kinda mashed in? Well, that leetle innocent white flower done that t' Jack.

"She laid him up fer a week. And when Jack come to hisself and reelized whut had done happened, his leetle white flower was gone, and she never come back."

"What became of her, Pa?"

"We-l-l, son, opinions vary. Some say she went to Goldfield and started a gamblin' hell there, and some say she went up to Alasky with the Klondike rush and started a gamblin' hell there. The p'int I was makin' is that Jack's an interestin' character. Mebbe ya can use him in one o' yore stories."

The novelist nodded enthusiastically.

"Oh, I can, Pa! It isn't often a writer finds a character ready-made. Why, he's perfect! It's just as I was telling a man I was talking with on the train. You must come out here to where such things happen. Now, just take that story you've been telling me. You couldn't invent such a story in a thousand years."

Pa nodded affirmatively.

"I reckon I c'n give ya passels o' plots, son. Skassly a man I know ain't got some plot roped up in his past somewhere. Jest take that other feller a-standin' there—the long, lanky one with the drooping mustache and th' yellor fangs. See him lookin' out over the desert with them smoky, dangerous gray eyes o' hisn?"

"Lupo the Wolf, they call him, son—and Lupo the Wolf is statin' the case mildly. Would ya think, to look at him, that that man a-standin' and a-dreamin there had single-handed and alone stood off thutteen of the most desprit characters and shot 'em down one by one ontill only one was left, a-bleatin' and a-whimperin' fer mercy? Would ya?"

"What happened to that one?" the novelist demanded.

"Son, I'm goin' to tell ya whut happened to that one. It ain't a purty story; it's a turrible story. But I'm aimin' to acquaint ya with facts. Whut you want, ef I ain't mistooken, is th' facts. Be I right?"

Gordon Manville Stackhouse nodded vigorously.

"You certainly are. Facts I need, I must have. I can supply the fiction to weave about those facts. Tell me what happened to that lone survivor who was bleating and whimpering for mercy."

"Now, son, jest be patient. D'ya recollect ever hearin' tell o' the Bloody War o' the Sheep Herders?"

"Oh, vaguely, vaguely."

"Well, this incident I'm about to relate happened then—the bloody war between the sheep herders and the cattlemen. P'raps ya've heard that them two factions has always been th' bitterest enemies?"

"As a matter of fact, I had."

"Well, Loupo the Wolf was in the cow business in them days. He was whut you Easterners call a bullwhacker."

"A cow-puncher?"

"Yes. Loupo the Wolf was a cowboy when the Bloody Battle o' the Sheep Herders took place. Five thousand men to a side they was—five thousand sheep herders and five thousand cow-punchers and cattle kings. Fer a solid week the fightin' was somethin' furious. Men were shot down like flies. Th' smoke rose up and made a cloud that turned the day into twilight.

"Three thousand of the sheep herders was drove in a single rush over a précipice—a-pilin' up down there in the valley seven thousand feet below like corkwood—a squirmin' mass of dead, dyin' and mangled sheep herders. And all this time Loupo the Wolf was fightin' a single-handed battle with thatteen o' the scoundrels.

"Down in a coulee, they was, crouchin' behind the rocks. Fer a solid week, son, without food, water or sleep, Loupo the Wolf kept that gang at bay, now and then a-pluggin' one of 'em. And on th' seventh day only one of them survived. The sun was jest settin' when Loupo wriggled and squirmed up to the rock where this rascal was a-layin'.

"The sheep herder was a-layin' on his

belly and aimin' along his Winchester at the rock where Loupo was supposed to be hidin', when Loupo crawled up on top o' this rock where the sheep herder was hidin'. He waited for the sheep herder to fire at the rock, and then he says, in that deadly low voice o' hisn: 'A real purty shot, stranger. Now, stick 'em up!'

"The sheep herder come to his feet with a screech of terror. Fer he knew that when he looked at Loupo the Wolf he was lookin' at death. He begun a-bleatin' and a-whimperin'. 'Pick up that spade over there,' says Loupo, 'and begin a-diggin''. 'What fur?' the scoundrel whimpered.

"'Fur yore grave,' says Loupo. 'And ef ya know any prayers, ya better begin a-sayin' of 'em now. Pray while ya dig, stranger; we ain't much time t' spare, 'cause the sun's a-gettin' low and I'm in sore need of food and sleep.'

"Well, the scoundrelly sheep herder picked up the spade, still a-bleatin' and a-whimperin' and when the grave was dug—" Pa's voice, choked with emotion, stopped. "Son, I cain't tell ya no more. It's too turrible."

"Did—did Loupo kill him?" the novelist gasped.

"Son it's too turrible!"

"Then he did shoot the poor fellow?"

"Yes, he shot him. They was a strong wind blowin' f'm the south, and Loupo stood that poor benighted sinner at the south end of the grave, so when the shot was fired the wind blew the pore feller into the grave.

"And that was the end of the Bloody Sheep Herders War, son. Only ten of the sheep herders ever escaped. Only ten men outa five thousand, and they wasn't one single casualty among the cowboys."

"Did Loupo get the girl?" the novelist demanded.

"Whut gal?"

"Was—wasn't there a girl in the story?"

Pa looked thoughtful. He brightened. "The sheep herder's daughter, ya mean?"

"Did he have a daughter?"

"Shore he did! A pure leetle innocent white flower she was, too. Ayop, Loupo got the gal. Ya see how dreamy and sad he's lookin' now? When he looks thataway

ya c'n always be sure he's a-thinkin' of that leetle innocent white flower—Margie Belle. There's a leetle white gravestone down Arizony way where that leetle white flower lays in eternal slumber. Struck down in the fullness of life by a rattlesnake. And wunst a y'ar Loupo saddles him up a hoss and rides down into Arizony to shed a tear o'er that leetle white tombstone."

"Poor fellow!"

"Oh, ya'd be su'prised, son, at the tragedies and th' drammer that's jest a-layin' around in Hossblanket fer a clever feller like you to write up. I c'n show ya character after character, all ready to fit right into one of yore novels. But, o' coss, I ain't got much time.

"I'm a busy man, and it jest keeps pore old Pa Jarvis a-humpin' to make ends meet, whut with prices on everythin' skyhootin' the way they be. I'd like to give ya a heap o' my time, but whut with me a-scrabblin' and a-muckin' away t' keep body and soul together, I cain't afford to spare ya all the time I'd like to."

"I wonder," the novelist said cautiously, "if I would offend you, Pa, if I were to offer to remunerate you for your services?"

"Well, I dunno, son. I'm purty easy offended. When ya come right down to it, I'm kinda foolish, I reckon, I'm so sensitive 'bout sech things. Now, jest whut was th' prop'sition ya was studyin' on makin' me, son?"

"To tell the truth, I hadn't worked out any definite proposition. I was so afraid of offending you by offering you money."

Pa laid his horny old hand on the novelist's knee.

"Gordon," he said in a voice tremulous with emotion, "they ain't but mighty few men I'd sit yere with and talk with concernin' sech an indelicate subject. But I like ya, son. There's somethin' 'bout you that's made a big hit with the old man. I'll jest try not to be any more offended than I c'n help, sensitive as I am. So s'posin' we work on a flat rate."

"A flat rate?" the novelist echoed vaguely.

"So much fer every character I deliver t' ya."

"Why—why—why, that's certainly fair enough!"

"Say, offhand, fifteen bucks fer ordinary characters and twenty-five fer leadin' characters—heroes, heroines, villains, and sech. Is that agreeable?"

"Indeed it is, Pa!"

"And jest to save bookkeepin', son, supposin' we settle on a cash basis—C.O.D.?"

"Fair enough."

"So up to date ya owe me jest forty-five dollars. That's fer three characters—Jack th' Jumper, Loupo th' Wolf, and me—fifteen bucks apiece."

Pa held out a large, toil-worn, time-gnarled old hand.

"You're sure I won't be offending you?" the young man inquired solicitously.

"I'm tryin' my dumbdest," Pa answered, "not to let my feelin's get injured. Thank ya, son. Four tens and a fiver. Now, lemme ask ya somethin'. Ponder it careful, son. Are ya out yere jest to look on and write novels, or would ya care to get right into th' thick of things?"

"Do you mean there's deviltry afoot?" the novelist gasped.

"I don't mean nothin' else but. There's a scoundrel out in them hills who's jumped a mine—the Bluebird property. He's out there a-squattin' on it, and keepin' the rightful owner out. And whut makes it turrible is that the rightful owner is a leetle innocent white flower of a gal."

"You don't mean that, Pa?"

"I mean, son," the old man said grimly, "that this pure little white flower is livin' right yere in this hotel, a-weepin' her big blue eyes out because they ain't no man yere who c'n spare the time to go up in the hills and drive this low-down, thievin' scoundrel of a Snacker off her prop'e'ty! That's whut I mean! And whut I want t' know is, w'd ya be int'rested?"

Gordon Manville Stackhouse slapped his knee.

"I would!" he snapped, caught up suddenly in a fictional fervor.

"C'n ya ride a hoss?"

"I can!"

"D'ya know the habits of a shootin'-iron? I mean, d'ya know how to shoot?"

"I do! I won medals in the army."

"Yo're willin' to go up in them hills
and risk yore life fer the sake of this leetle
innocent pure white flower of a gal?"

"I am!"

Pa relaxed. "Son, I c'n fix it fer ya. But it'll take engineerin'. It may mean spendin' a leetle money, bribin' sartain parties. They's dozens of men jest a-rearin' and a-cravin' and a-thirstin' to go out thar and kill off this man Snacker fer this sweet leetle gal. Whut I mean is, air ya willin' to spend that money?"

"How much?"

"I c'n arrange everythin' fer ya fer—
fer two hundred bucks."

"Here," said the novelist, producing a healthy roll of fifties and hundreds, "it is." He counted the money into Pa's palm.

Pa folded the bills and added them to the illicit hoard in his hip pocket.

"I'll fix it!" Pa snapped. "Yo're jest the man she's been a-lookin' fer to kill One-Shot Snacker! Will ya do it—shore?"

"Yes, by gad! I'll kill Snacker!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



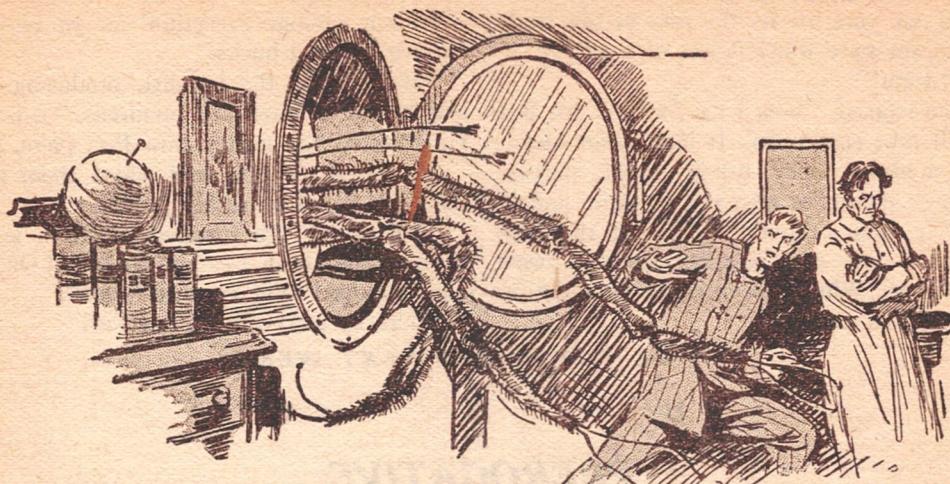
PREROGATIVE

OH, Bill, he comes from way out West,
Where hop-toads grow knee-high.
And roosters are so big, their wings
Can plumb shut out the sky!
They has such rain out there, he says,
As we will never know,
And, 'cording to the tales he tells,
We've never seen it snow!

The wheat they grow's like ears of corn,
And grapes, like tangerines!
They even uses washing pots
To cook their turnip greens!
The horses are so wild, they act
Like boogers breaking loose!
Their very flivvers have been known
To fill the calaboose!

Oh, Bill he makes a lot of noise,
And says a heap of things
That kind of make me think that he
Ain't sprouted any wings!
But let me tell you something, folks,
That man's got eyes like steel,
And packs a fist whose hitting power
I wouldn't like to feel!

His country is so big, I 'low,
He learned to talk that way,
And some of it is serious-like,
But most of it is play.
Now, this lambasting ain't just like
You think it is, and still,
I guess I've got the right, because
You see, I married Bill!



Creatures of the Ray

By JAMES L. ATON

THE true story of the tragedy at Coatsville hasn't yet been printed. Indeed no one knows the truth save me—and I've been keeping still. Our Chicago dailies have headlined the lists of dead and missing, of buildings burned, of heaps of human bones—but no reporter has come within a mile of guessing how it all came to pass.

As for evidence, when the rescuers reached the place, every trace of the Things that caused the rumpus had been destroyed—I saw to that, you know. Most people think that a scientific madman named Gilreath burned up the town and then killed himself.

There are plenty of wild tales, of course. The popular version for the Sunday Supplement is that there was an invasion of Martians—who came, destroyed, disappeared. Then there's the theory that Gilreath was experimenting with a synthetic man who ran amuck, a sort of mechanical Mr. Hyde. But as for the truth—

It's time it was told; so here it is:

Thinking people must be made to realize the danger we're in, must put a muzzle on our scientific investigators, before some wild one mixes the wrong blends of atoms in his laboratory and blows up the earth.

I'm only a newspaper reporter, so I'll not attempt a scientific treatise. My tale begins one morning last July, when I was summoned to conference with my chief—Gregor of the *Chicago World*.

"You're to get an interview with Professor Gilreath," he said.

"Gilreath?" I repeated puzzled. "I don't recall the name."

"He's a scientist," explained the chief. "One of the narrow-minded sort who go in for pure science. You know what I mean—a chap who'll spend a lifetime counting the atoms in a grain of salt without ever thinking ahead as to the possible scientific revolution that may follow his finished work."

"The country's full of them," I nodded. "It's those painstaking boys who are making the big discoveries of the day."

"That's my point," said the chief. "That's the very reason I'm giving you this new assignment. From now on you're to watch for these scientific discoveries; get them the day before they're announced. It's a bigger scoop these days to cover a cancer cure than a double murder. But now about this man Gilreath—there have been rumors for a long time that he's on the trail of something big. The Hearst papers have had two men trying to interview him—one of the two is in the hospital—the professor smashed his jaw. He's the sort who dislikes publicity."

"Oh!" I meditated.

"He's been doing radium research," went on Gregor. "He's had one or two dry articles in the scientific journals. One was entitled 'Radium in Evolution,' whatever that may mean. Last year he fell heir to a slice of money and has used it to build an isolated laboratory in a cow pasture down near Coatsville in Jefferson County."

"That's a funny place for a laboratory," I put in. "I'd think—"

"I'm talking!" said the chief shortly; he likes to make long speeches, does Gregor, but can't endure them from any one else. "Gilreath has kept his laboratory a mystery," he went on. "No one but himself ever sets foot in it. He stays there night and day; has his meals brought to the door. And there have been rumors of strange rays coming from his window at night. One cow has been killed supposedly by these rays. You can imagine how curious those small town hicks must be to have something like that going on in their midst."

"I can," I agreed briefly as Gregor paused. "Where did you get all this dope?"

"From last week's Coatsville *Independent*," answered the chief. "Here's the article. Charley had it clipped to put in his funny column, and I happened to spot it. It looks like something big. I want you to go—now—and don't come back till you get the story."

He swung around to his desk and forgot me. I went.

I stepped off the train at Coatsville late the next afternoon.

"Hotel?" asked the lank driver of the bus; it was an old time bus with horses

such as I hadn't seen for years—"Jefferson House" painted on the sides.

I handed him my suit case.

"Where is Professor Gilreath's place?" I asked.

"Up top of that hill," the bus driver pointed away from town. "On beyond Warren's big farmhouse. Mrs. Warren does his washing and takes him in his meals."

I knew I should have taken time to pump the bus driver for a story; but it was getting toward night, and I had it in mind to have a look at the professor before dark.

"Take my grip to the hotel," I ordered. "I'll be back," and started.

As I went across the track, I heard the bus driver speak to the loafers who were holding up the station. "Another newspaper man," he said. "I reckon we'd better go over there after awhile and pick up what's left of the poor cuss."

"This interview calls for diplomacy," I said to myself.

On my way up the long hill I tried to think of how I should approach Gilreath to save myself from a bust on the jaw. A scheme that I had used one time before with success came into my mind; I decided to give it a try.

Mrs. Warren was opening the mail box at the roadside as I came along. She was a buxom countrywoman with a pleasant face, and she looked at me with friendly curiosity.

"How do you do?" I said. "I'm looking for Professor Gilreath's place."

"Right through that lane," she pointed. "There on top of that hill in the cow pasture."

"That round thing?" I asked.

"That's it," she answered. "Looks like a cheese box—just beyond all those cows."

"I thought he killed a cow," I remarked.

"He did," she confirmed. "Since then half the folks in town have brought their cows out to my pasture."

I looked my comprehension.

"He paid for the cow," she explained. "Three times what it was worth. He's got lots of money. Everybody's praying his cow will be struck next. They're paying me two dollars a month apiece for the use of my pasture."

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "Some kind of ray—in the night. The cow was like ashes."

"Doesn't it make folks mad?" I quizzed her, thinking of the write-up in the Coatesville paper, "having him do things like that? Aren't they apt to run him out of town?"

"Why should they?" she retorted. "He's a nice man, and he minds his own business. Of course, everybody's curious. But they all like the way he handled them pesky newspaper men. You'd better take my advice and stay away—you're a newspaper man, ain't you?"

"I'm a brother scientist," I evaded, and left her.

At the head of the lane I turned and looked back. She was still standing by the mail box looking after me. I fancied that there was pity in her face. Could I have dreamed of how I was to see her again, the pity would have been in my face for her.

I took notice, too, of the Warren house; an immense three-story farmhouse of thirty rooms, big enough for an army. Then I swung round and footed it briskly up the lane.

Gilreath's building reminded me of a picture in my old school history—the round turret of the monitor. It was built of square blocks of concrete, squatting atop the hill, solid and flat as if built to stand the shock of ages. I went up toward it warily, not really afraid, but nervous, apprehending the onslaught of some mystic ray. All was peaceful and still, like a great round tombstone standing impassive upon the eternal hills.

I walked half around it before I came to the door. There were deep-set, tiny, round windows, like the portholes of a ship. The interior, as I found later, was lighted largely by skylights. The oaken door was fast shut. I rang the bell vigorously.

The door slid open on noiseless bearings. I stood confronting the professor.

I've interviewed more than one of our modern ultra-scientists, and I've found the top-notchers either as hairy as gorillas or else as bald as pumpkins. The gorillas are

fiery but sympathetic; the pumpkins are cold and unpitying.

Gilreath was neither, yet his light blue eyes were as hard as steel and his face was like flint. He was dressed all in laboratory white, impersonally professional.

"Yes?" he snapped.

"I have come to see Dr. Gilreath," I answered, putting on my most scientific air.

"Speaking!" he said shortly.

I had read up on the man in Who's Who before leaving Chicago, so I felt that my fiction was safe.

"You're invited to honorary membership in the Royal Academy of Science of Copenhagen," I told him.

He stood back and let me enter. The tiny room was like a physician's waiting room; the laboratory lay beyond.

"Sit down!" he motioned me to a chair. "Your name, please?"

"Jonas Olson," I answered. I have yellow hair and felt that I could pass off as a Dane.

"What is the occasion of this invitation?" he quizzed standing before me.

"Your article on 'Radium in Evolution.'"

"You have read it?" he asked; there was a suggestion of wistfulness in his voice.

"Not I!" I answered, playing safe. "We Danes don't take time to read outside our own subject. However, the members of our radium division have read—"

"Your subject?" he broke in.

"Insects." There I felt that I was on safe ground. Gilreath, wrapped up in radium, would surely know nothing about insects. "My specialty is the thought-life of the ant. Perhaps you read my article in the July number of the—

"No!" he interrupted. "I did not. I am inclined to think that you are an impostor."

"Say—" I stuttered, not knowing what to tell him next.

"That does not matter," he went on ignoring my confusion. "I am now about to undertake the crowning experiment of my work, and I was wishing for a witness when you rang. Whether you are scientist or reporter does not matter—I am glad you are here."

"Is this an experiment with radium?" I asked eagerly, forgetting all my pose.

"No, Mr. Newspaper Man," he sneered. "It is not. I have a new ray—ten thousand times more powerful than radium. You shall see in good season. Are you willing to spend the night?"

"Yes!"

"This way!" he ushered me into an immaculate bathroom. "Clean yourself thoroughly and put on this white coat before you come into the laboratory."

I made haste to obey, exultant at thought of the scoop I was getting for the *World*. After two Hearst men had failed. This was a trip worth while.

"And so—" It was an hour later and Gilreath was coming to the end of a wearisome lecture on radium. Lord only knows how many long-named authorities he had quoted; the whole talk went over my head till it came to his summing up. "Practically every ray-therapeutist agrees that radium, properly applied, should manifest potential constructive force, that its rays have the power to stimulate growth as regards size, speed and quality."

"Yes," I chipped in as he paused for breath. "That's what Brisbane says."

"I don't know the name!" he snapped. "Who is he?" then went on without waiting for an answer: "Against this accepted theory we must set the fact that such life-giving qualities have never yet been adequately demonstrated—that the sole use made of radium to-day is destructive—in burning away superficial malignant growths such as cancer, and that even there its value is debatable. As far as doing with radium the thing that we say that it can do, we have not even made a start."

"But," I began, "I thought—"

"I isolated myself here for one purpose and only one," he drove right on. "That was to develop a controlled, constructive, beneficial radium ray. Until a month ago such was my sole direction of research. And then of a sudden I made a great new discovery—that the feeble emanations of radium—its beta and gamma rays—were but suggestions of a great, new, all-penetrating, all-powerful, yet perfectly controllable force or ray; and I discovered, overnight

almost, the source of this new force, a source as exhaustless and as universal as sunlight. I am endeavoring to put this in plain unscientific language; do you follow me?"

"You mean that you have perfected a controlled radium ray," I answered. "Was that what killed Mrs. Warren's cow?"

"My ray is not radium," he said, ignoring my question about the cow. "It does all that radium can ever do and infinitely more. I have named it Ray GL. For the purpose that I have in mind it is perfected and controlled; and to-night will see its first demonstration. Scientist though I am, I have not outgrown certain primitive emotions; among them is the human longing for comradeship in a supreme hour. I am yielding to that emotion. I welcome your companionship in this, the great hour of my life. I am glad that you have come."

His tone was as cold as ice; but I fancy his speech of welcome was as warm as any pumpkin scientist could make under the most emotional circumstances on earth. Our universities have been breeding cold-bloods who look on love and friendship as anomalies to be teased under the microscope. Anyway, this was better than being banged on the jaw and thrown off the place.

I stood about in the way for an hour and watched while the professor made final inspection of his ray machine—a great many-tubed affair of copper like an x-ray apparatus. It was mounted on a wheeled stand and had an adjustable nozzle like the mouth of a camera. I took good care not to get in front of the nozzle; despite my curiosity I had no desire to be cremated along with Mrs. Warren's cow.

"I'll not attempt to explain this to you," said Gilreath shortly. "You could not understand its technicalities. As I have told you, it generates a new ray more powerful than radium. For demonstration I have only to turn it on any organic substance for a stated period and await results. At the strength to which I am adjusting it, I estimate that ten hours will be necessary for it to produce perceptible consequences. The accident with the cow happened when I first assembled the machine."

"It is possible, you understand, to gen-

erate rays strong enough to consume everything under heaven. I have set the dial, as you will note, at AR, and at that strength its force should be wholly beneficial. Turn it to BZ, and I could burn up the whole town of Coatesville in two minutes."

"How far will it shoot?" I asked.

"Its radius is not less than ten miles," he answered. "For to-night—" by now it was dusk—"we will focus it through this window upon the vegetation beneath." He wheeled it to one of the narrow portholes in his laboratory. "This first demonstration will have to do with the common grasses of the field."

"What do you predict will happen?"

"Predictions are silly things," he answered shortly, "fit only for newspaper reporters and politicians. It is enough to know that the ray has begun its work. Tomorrow at daybreak we shall see what we shall see."

I must say that my next hours with the professor bored me unutterably. Our modern scientist who knows only one thing is dreary at the best, and Gilreath was discourteous as well as dreary. I did my best to make talk—about airplanes, about politics, about art.

"I'm not interested," was his stock answer; his tone was that of a misanthrope who soured on the human race.

He'd have been at least humanly endurable if he had shown a he-man interest in the doings of his ray which was beating with invisible force upon a twelve-inch circle of grass just outside the window. For here surely was the creature of his dreams. Had he been human enough to run often to the window and peep out eager for results, I could have understood and sympathized. But instead he ignored it. He had put it to work, and, like the scientist that he was, he was content to wait.

He sat through the evening as cold as ice and as taciturn as a crab. I hated him before our simple supper was half through, and I yawned off to bed at the earliest excuse.

He gave me his own bed in a little room on beyond the lab. I suspect that he sat up through the long night waiting—coldly, unemotionally waiting. Could I have

guessed the coming horror of the morrow, I'd have been sleepless as well, instead of dropping off as I did and snoring all night long.

II.

I WAS in the war zone facing a cloud of poisonous gas. The acrid, musky fumes filled my throat; I coughed, choked, gagged, sickened.

The smell woke me up. I was not in the war zone, I was in Gilreath's bed. But the odor was real, a sickening musky stench that made me gag.

It had been daylight for an hour. I hopped out of bed and began to dress.

"Wonder what dose he's mixing up now?" was my thought; I supposed, of course, that the smell came from some experiment in the lab.

There was one of the deep twelve-inch portholes just opposite my bed. I strolled across to take a peep out while I was buttoning my pants.

The Warren farmhouse stood outlined afar off against the sunrise like a painting in a round frame. Pretty! There are many such pretty homes in rural Illinois. I pulled the round window open on its hinge and stuck my head through to peer at the pasture outside—to see what the professor's ray had done.

"It's done it all right!" I gaped amazement. "Too strong—always will be!"

The green of the pasture was gone—turned overnight into a plowed and furrowed field. Not plowed, either. I don't mean that. There was a ridge of dirt, a great towering ridge ten feet across, six feet high, running past my window over across the field in a great arc. It had not been thrown up by any conceivable digging tool of man; it was built of symmetrical balls of earth as large as basket balls, fashioned with perfect evenness, stacked high with sloping regularity.

Beyond the ridge was but bare earth, no touch of green. There was something about it all that was sinister and ugly, as desolate as a field in hell.

"God!" I muttered. "He'll have to be stopped; that machine will burn up the earth!"

The smell came stronger on the morning breeze. It seemed to come from the great curving ridge of earth balls. I tried to identify it with the smell of burning, but could not; there was no scorching to this odor; it was simply an abominable, nasty, musky stench.

I turned back to finish dressing, sat down on the edge of my bed and laced my shoes. It stuck in my mind that I had glimpsed something shining white on the ground just beneath my window. I got up, curious to see what it was, stuck my head far through the window and looked down at the ground beneath.

Bones! The skeleton of a quadruped—one of the cows that had been turned sacrificially into the pasture. The bones were as clean as if they had bleached for a year in the Sahara. I peeped farther along the wall—another skeleton and another, lying desolate on the barren earth.

"He'll have some cows to pay for," I thought, and leaned forward looking at them in puzzlement. Why hadn't the all-consuming ray destroyed the bones?"

I got a horried throatful of the musky odor; I choked and coughed.

A Thing—a Creature—appeared of a sudden on the ridge of earth not ten feet from my head. It was as if he had leaped up out of the ground. That was what he had done, I concluded later—come up out of the ground through an opening invisible from my window.

A gas-mask—that was my first impression of the Thing. A face, and yet not a face; a shining, mouthless, noseless expanse of head, two long, snaky, waving arms in the place where should have been his eyes—octopuslike arms longer than my own, damnably threatening.

I drew back in horror, still coughing.

The Thing was at me like a bullet; the legs behind the gas-mask hurled him through the air at my window like the lunge of a rattlesnake. If I hadn't been already drawn in before he struck, he would have had me; my bones would have bleached beside those of Mrs. Warren's cows.

He was too big to get in through my porthole; his head was fifteen inches high at the least; but his legs reached through

—not one of his waving arms which I later saw were antennæ—the front pair of his six long legs which had thrown him at me across the ten-foot space.

Mechanical things, those legs! Jointed like a ship crane's handy steel arm, and yet an unclean brown, covered with a growth that was neither feathers nor hair, an evil growth that exuded sticky, grasping drops of nastiness.

The legs went into my porthole, moved about mechanically, seeking me, came within a foot of my head. Fear gave me resource; I grasped the copper-framed plate-glass window, evading the blind legs, and slammed it shut. It closed on one of the legs. I pushed with all my strength; the copper frame of the window cut through the leg like the stalk of a peony; the lower joint fell at my feet.

The Thing stood on his five sound legs outside the closed window, studying the smooth glass with his quivering antennæ while I locked it firmly shut. He had a great wide mouth, I saw then, a beak, rather, that snapped savagely below his smooth, gas-mask face. His body—six feet long it was, built in segments like three tinker-toys on a string—pulsated with life, gave forth a drumming sound like a partridge. Other evil Things answered his signal, a dozen of them; they gathered outside, feeling ominously of the concrete blocks of Gilreath's laboratory.

The severed leg at my feet had hold of me, had the calf of my leg, gripped me. I grabbed Gilreath's umbrella and struck at it viciously, struck it loose and away. It lay quivering on the floor; there was a nasty stickiness on my sock that made me sick.

"How now, Mr. Newspaper Man?"

Gilreath stood in the doorway. There was repressed triumph in his voice. His hand was pointing at the pawing creatures outside the window.

"What are they?" I demanded hoarsely.

"What are they?" He repeated my question as too simple to need a reply.

"Lord, yes!" I cried excitedly. "What are they? Martians? Devils? What? They're like nothing ever seen on earth! They're awful impossibilities."

"Like nothing ever seen on earth," he said my words over, rolling them on his tongue as if they held hidden meaning.

"Confound you!" I shouted. "Can't you talk? We'll have to do something; get away from here and give the alarm. Stop your yapping and get down to facts."

"It is obvious that you lack the scientific mind," he was ignoring the Things outside and studying me as one might a unique specimen. "If you will discontinue your wild shouting for a few moments and concentrate on these phenomena which excite you, the solution will become quickly evident."

I gaped at him angrily.

"You fool!" There was no passion in his voice; only cold judgment. He had hold of my arm, and he was as strong as a horse. "Get into the laboratory here, sit down and keep still. I'll see if I can lecture a little sense into your undeveloped brain."

Four chairs stood in a row on the far side of the lab—observation seats in an experiment station. The professor shoved me forcibly into one of these chairs, then sat down beside me.

"This is a more favorable position from which to observe developments," he said.

I sat looking into a great ten-foot mirror. By some trick of reflection the mirror showed the field just outside the wall—the great, curving ridge of dirt balls, the dozen Things still feeling about my closed window, the white skeletons of the defunct cows. Beyond the ridge was a wide gaping hole in the ground.

As I watched, one of the horrid, six-legged Things shot up out of this hole and made off with incredible rapidity across the field. Another followed him, and another—perhaps twenty or thirty in all. They sped off the mirror out of sight.

"We watch Earth's new masters going to their first conquests," said Gilreath sententiously.

The Things outside my window gave over their investigations and ran down into the hole out of sight. We sat gazing at a barren, grassless field, as desolate as an ash heap.

"What are they?" I asked in agony of mind.

"Visualize, if you will, what took place in the night under my ray," suggested the professor leisurely. "Visualize the grasses springing up to the height of bamboos—an inch in a minute, five feet in an hour. Visualize other things that lived among the grasses growing up likewise."

"The grass has been burned up," I objected.

"The grass has been devoured," he said with quiet positiveness. "Devoured by growing creatures—creatures forced into sudden phenomenal growth by my ray—creatures ravenous for nourishment, devouring the grasses, root and branch, turning carnivorous as they grew and attacking other insects, and then the cows—and still, I fancy, seeking a field for further food."

My imagination struggled at impossibilities. I dared not think.

"Six-legged insects," went on the professor as quietly as if describing a bit of cloth. "Six-legged insects who dig hills in the ground and live in communism, touched in a night into gianthood under my marvelous ray."

"Ants!" I whispered in awe. "Ants! Great Heaven!"

"Ants!" agreed Gilreath. "Long praised by philosophers as the most moral and intelligent of all creatures. And consider this: that with growth in size will follow corresponding growth in intellect. Man has tried and failed—now, under my ray, a new master has risen up to recreate the earth. I wait to—"

That scream! It will ring in my ears forever! Shriek after shriek of frightened madness, blood-curdling, hideous!

I leaped to my feet.

"Ha!" said the professor with cold interest, and leaned forward to watch the mirror.

Came into view two of the hideous gas-mask ants, dragging between them, her face bloody, her clothing rent, her arms half torn from their sockets, her shrieks of madness rending the air, the woman who had fetched us our supper the night before—Mrs. Warren!

"As I thought," approved Gilreath unperturbed.

"Stop them!" I cried; I grasped his ray machine and gave it a pull. "Turn on your rays, burn them up! They'll get us all!"

"If they are more fit than man to prevail—" he began sternly.

I made at him in fury.

But he was ready for me. His hand went up, holding a rubber sack. Choking fumes filled my face. I staggered back, down into unconsciousness. One last glimpse I had ere I fainted of the mirror—a great mass of brown and horrid Things—squirming, fighting for blood!

III.

ONE moment I was lying with my eyes open at Gilreath's back, too drowsy even to think; the next moment memory burned, and I was wide awake. But my strength was missing—the dose he had shot into my lungs had made me as weak as a baby. I could move my head, and think, and observe, but I could not lift my arm or my leg.

Gilreath stood with his hands behind his back meditatively studying the great mirror. My eyes followed his to its panorama-like display.

A pair of the horrid giant ants were smelling idly about at the yawning mouth of their nest; save for them the field was deserted and dead. I saw at my first look a change; for now there were piles of skeletons lying about the mouth of the pit—human skeletons, fifty of them—grown men mostly, but some little children—a great charnel-house of death.

I groaned, deadly sick.

"Ah!" said the professor coldly. "I see you're coming round. You've had a bit of rest—twenty-four hours. Maybe now you can show some sense."

"I can't move," I replied. "I'm sick."

"That will pass soon enough," he said without sympathy.

I jerked my head toward the mirror. "Couldn't you stop them?" I asked.

"I had no desire to stop them," answered Gilreath. "I have been studying, observing, thinking, visualizing the future of the world."

"They're cannibals," I pleaded.

"They are not," he said crisply. "You are mistaken in your term. They devour men, but they are not cannibals, they do not devour one another."

"You saw them do it!" I accused. My voice was hoarse.

"It was worth seeing," he said unfeelingly. "Last evening the men of New Galilee organized a punitive expedition against the ants. They were armed with guns and clubs, the ants had only their legs. It was a good fight; I was proud of my insect protégés. They won in a walk; teamwork, coöperation, added to their incredible speed."

"They'll bring troops," I reasoned.

"The troops will not come for a few days," he retorted. "Before then we'll be ready for them. My immediate problem is to get into intelligent communication with the ants that I may prepare them for the fight. They'll have the use of my Ray GL—it will wipe out any troops that come within ten miles."

"My God!" I cried angrily. "You—you—"

"Silence!" he broke in sternly. "I have no use for your silly sentiment. You are a worshiper of man as the supreme being. Silly! Man has made a failure with the earth: turned it into a shambles, destroyed all life that he could not enslave; worse than that, lifted his hand against his own brother in endless war. Wherever two men meet there is discord, strife, murder. With such a race progress is impossible."

He gestured wildly as he spoke; there was a burning, dancing madness in his light blue eyes. I began to understand—the man was a maniac, yet a maniac with wit and intelligence to make his distorted dreams come true. I grew sick at the thought—man's beautiful world turned into a great stinking ant-hill.

"This, my new creation—" the professor motioned toward the mirror. "Behold him! Intelligence greater already than our own and growing apace. I have been studying them from afar through the window. This first day, of course, their need of food has rendered them ravenous, unreasoning. But that stage is passing; they are begin-

ning thoughtfully to adjust themselves to their new environment. Already they have taken possession of the Warren house, their eggs and pupæ are in every room. To-day I saw two of them turning the wheels on a lumber wagon, grasping the lesson of transportation.

"They open and close the doors and windows of the house. Presently they, too, will begin to build, or rather their men slaves will build under their guidance. The Warren barn is full of their captives. This morning for the first time they did not devour them bodily; instead they drew a measure of blood from each one, then stanchéd the bleeding, reserving them alive for future use. So you see—"

"The women!" I broke in; it was useless to plead, but I could not be silent. "For God's sake, think of the women!"

My words threw the professor into a frothing fit of rage.

"Woman!" he cried bitterly, standing above me with waving fists. "Woman! What is she? The crowning failure of civilization, flaunting the secrets of sex in the market-place! Calling to all the lower passions of man, violating all the purposes of creation. Prating of love—and when a true man offers her true love, casting him aside for a pot of gold!"

"You fool!" I cried angrily; I had grown reckless of life, if I might but sting this madman into sanity. "You're cheap. Because you've been jilted, taking it out on the whole human race. For shame!"

"If I have had an unfortunate personal experience," his tone grew suddenly cold and deliberate, and his cold blue eyes ate into my own, "it has but served to open my eyes to the wider truth. All the more reason that I should lend myself as servants to these—" he motioned toward the mirror—"to these wonderful creatures who exalt and glorify the majesty of sex."

My very soul fainted within me. It was all so incredible, preposterous—this scientific madman lending all his intellect to destroy the human race. I closed my eyes in bitterness of spirit.

"I shall take the first steps to-day to establish communications," his voice came to my ears, as he paced thoughtfully back

and forth. "As soon as you get up a bit more strength, I shall send you out as my ambassador—to try out the methods that I have planned before I risk myself. I must make them see that my service to them is to be that of the intellect, to aid them in their climb toward civilization. I'll make them see it, never fear. They have wonderful sense, none of man's silly conflicts and warfare, only peaceful communism and coöperation—a oneness of mind and soul that will make war forever impossible."

My eyes opened to the realization that the great mirror was alive with life. A thousand great, horse-size, octopus-armed ants were struggling for place; and I saw that part were brown like those I had seen first; and the rest were red, slightly smaller than their cousins, but fiercer and nakeder looking, and that the browns and the reds were locked in fiery conflict.

"They're fighting now!" I cried.

He swung about and looked in amazement at the mirror, then ran across to his radium machine and inspected it hurriedly.

"It's been shifted," I heard him mutter. "It's been sighting at the hill across the river—this is another tribe grown up. I mustn't let them fight; it will upset all—"

He dashed from the room. I heard the creak of an opening door.

I saw him rush into sight on the mirror into the midst of the great army of struggling ants.

"Don't fight!" I heard him shout; he was crazy, you know, as wild as a loon. "Don't fight! Coöperate! Wait! I'll tell you how!"

They didn't listen, didn't wait. He went down under a great rushing horde. The last I saw of him was his arm, ripped like a morsel of cloth from his body, gripped in a gas-mask jaw.

My strength came back all at once to meet the crisis. I leaped to my feet. I've been panicky sometimes in my life, but in that supreme hour my mind was as clear as a bell, my self-control perfect.

I ran across to the ray machine, sighted it through the window—remembering Gilreath's instructions—and turned its dial to the maximum force of BZ.

Death leaped from its nozzle like a flame. The ants whom it struck disappeared on the instant, burned into nothingness. Calmly, coolly, deliberately, I swung the nozzle back and forth, up and down. In thirty seconds the field was won—burned into desolate blackness of ashes.

I swung it across at the great Warren farmhouse which leaped on the touch into flames, swung it across the valley at the breeding place of the red ants, then paused and looked through Gilreath's glasses to make sure that my work was complete.

There were ants in the streets of Coatsville, and I trained my rays on them. I saw a trail of red ants along the river-bank, and as I burned them, the rays struck the water and threw it up in a hissing cloud of steam. I clenched my teeth and swore and stayed on the job; I made sure that Jefferson County was thoroughly sterilized before at last I smashed the machine.

IV.

It was only two days ago that they let me out of Augustana Hospital. Gregor had me sent there when I got back to Chicago—wide-eyed, trembling. For six weeks they had me strapped to my bed. I think

that Gregor told them I had been drinking bad hooch.

He came to my bedside once a week; and when I tried to report on my assignment, a fresh young interne came along and put a hypodermic into my arm. Perhaps his method as well as his intention was all right; I was crazy, I know, and I came near staying so.

“Shut up!” was what the chief said yesterday when I went up to the office and started to talk. “If you don’t, I’ll send you back to the hospital. You may be telling the truth, but you can’t stand the strain of talking about it. Rest up for a week, and I’ll assign you to police court.”

I was digging through the files reading the bunk that had been printed about Coatsville when Bill Marvin came past.

“I’m off for Ann Arbor,” he said. “Some professor in the college there claims he has a radium ray that will make things grow. I’ve got to get him.”

“Go to it!” I growled. “Get him! Get him with a gun!”

And that’s pretty close to what I meant. We’ve got to begin to put a check on these scientific investigators—before some wild bird hits on the ultimate secret in his laboratory and blows up the earth.

THE END

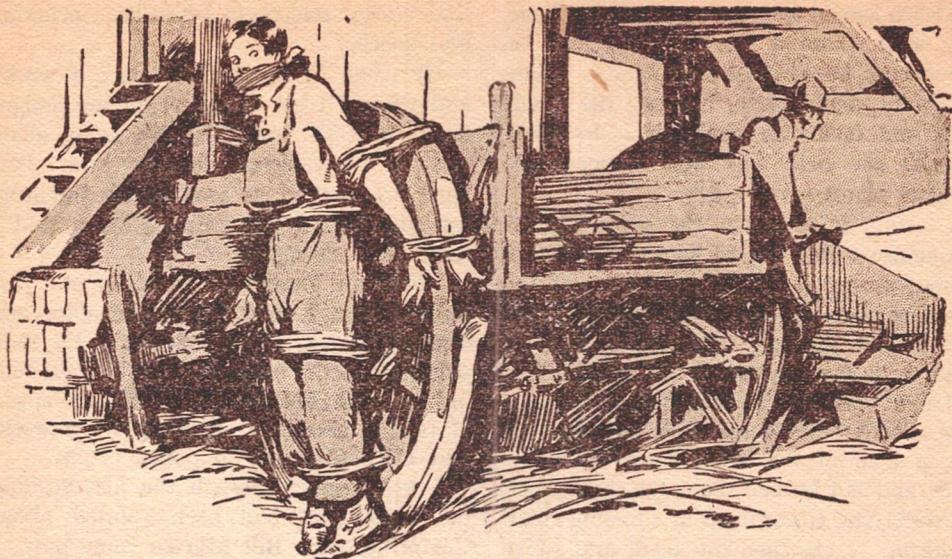


IN A THEATER

A SLIM young dancer in a gypsy mask
Sways rhythmically to a gypsy tune;
The stage lights glow above her, like the moon
That pours out silver from the shining flask;
She moves before the music, and she seems
A young gitania of the southern hills,
Who knows the winds and stars by name, and fills
The casket of her soul with gypsy dreams.

She drifts into the moonlight, and the song
Goes trembling into silence. Then a roar
Of swift applause breaks out. She comes again
To ask, and to receive, the praises that belong
To her. The dream is broken, and once more
She is a vain young dancer in a mask.

Gwen Bristow



Don't Look for the Woman

By **CHARLTON L. EDHOLM**
Author of "Lookin' For Trouble," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

KANE RYDER, secretary to the important Dr. Ludlow, is driving home at 3 A.M. Gypsy O'Farrell, a spitfire product of the tenements, is afoot on this lonely road after using her fists on "Tige" Moran and "Billy the Snitch," who "got fresh." Kane chivalrously shelters the beautiful waif. At dawn she has vanished. The doctor's week-end guests have been robbed. One of them, Major Fester, is found stabbed to death. Police Lieutenant Kearney arrests Grimshaw, a servant, for the murder. Kane overtakes Gypsy, disguised in boy's clothing. Believing her innocent, he gets her a job as "boy" helper in the Ludlow stables. Lieutenant Kearney now suspects Mrs. Flora Anstruther, who had quarreled with Major Fester over Eunice Ludlow. Kane discovers that his employer is a bootlegger. Gypsy and Kane have a fight with Moran and the Snitch, who later kidnap the girl. Kane, to get ransom money, agrees to become Dr. Ludlow's rum-runner. Riggs, butler, is Kane's lieutenant. Eunice tells Kane that Mrs. Anstruther threatens to kill her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WARNING.

EUNICE LUDLOW had taken Kane Ryder's hands in both of hers and stared at him with fear in her eyes. "Can I count on you?" she said. "Will you protect me from that horrible woman?"

"You can count on me." At that moment Kane was almost swept off his feet by the appealing loveliness of his employer's daughter. She looked so pale and fragile, as delicate as a wild rose. All his manhood was roused in an instinct of protection for this charming girl.

Slowly their bodies drew together, her

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eyes rested on his, her lips were half parted, smiling, expectant, and Kane felt his lips irresistibly drawn toward them.

At that instant something fell at their feet with a thud, and they started back in alarm, their hands falling apart abruptly.

Kane stooped and picked up the object, which had been hurled from some unseen hiding place. It was a stone half as large as his fist, wrapped in a piece of crumpled paper.

Kane jumped up, a little startled and furious at whoever had been guilty of playing this trick on him. He stared at the bushes in every direction, but there was no movement, no sign of life, and at a sharp little cry from Eunice he returned to her.

The girl had smoothed out the paper that had been wrapped about the stone, and now with trembling fingers she pointed to a rough scrawl written in lead pencil:

Get wise! Trubble coming your way.

The message was unsigned and its meaning was vague. For that very reason it left the girl and the boy more uneasy than a more direct warning would have done. For it was a warning. Some one had spied upon them, perhaps overheard every word they said, and had taken this means to let them know that still others were watching them with hostile eyes.

With a faint cry of dismay, Eunice ran swiftly toward the house, and Kane, left to himself, struck out in the opposite direction, looking for some trace of the person who had written those words and resolved to demand an explanation.

But it was useless. There was no trace of any one lurking in the shrubbery.

As he neared the wall of the estate he fancied that he heard a crackling of twigs where some one might have leaped over the wall, but when he dashed into the low-growing trees at that spot there was no sign of any living creature.

Kane returned to the bench where he had sat with Eunice and listened to her story. He wanted to study that paper again, to see whether there might be any clew as to the sender of that mysterious message, but when he got to the place the paper had disappeared.

It was strange. He had felt certain that Eunice had let it fall from her fingers when she fled to the house. But the paper was no longer there.

Kane shrugged his shoulders. Now that the first little shock was over, he was inclined to make light of the matter. Perhaps it was the practical joke of some trespasser.

He set off toward the barn to see Peter Wilkins regarding the disposal of the liquor that was stored there. He would have to find out the number of cases concealed in the hay. He would have to decide how many cars would be needed to transport the stuff.

Also he was hoping that he might stumble on Gypsy. That was unlikely, he knew. The two bootleggers had undoubtedly stowed her away in some safe place, frightening her by threats of the police.

Still there was always a chance!

As he entered the dusky interior of the barn there was no sign of Peter Wilkins. He was not dozing or smoking his pipe in any of his accustomed lounging places and he did not answer when Kane shouted his name.

Instead of that there was a harsh croak at his elbow and Kane whirled to find himself face to face with Tige Moran.

"You double crosser," snarled the bootlegger with ferocity. "Don't think you can get away with it!"

Kane jumped as if he had been shot, then steadied himself and faced his malignant enemy.

"Get away with what? I don't know what you're talking about."

"You know well enough, damn you! It was you that helped Gypsy to make her get-away!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN UNADMIRABLE CRICHTON.

"**G**YPSY has escaped!" Kane's voice expressed astonishment and joy.

But the rum-runner was not convinced that this was news to her friend.

"You know damn well she got away. I don't know how you done it, but I'm dead sure you had a hand in getting her loose. Much good it 'll do you. Billy the Snitch

is out hunting for her now. He'll run her down."

With a tremendous effort at self-control, Kane held back his fists that fairly ached to smash into Moran's bloated face. He had felt the joy of battering those sullen features, and he wanted to feel that pleasure once more.

But he mastered himself, for he knew that until Gypsy was quite clear of danger it would be wiser to make terms with this ruffian.

"I didn't help the girl get away," he protested. "I gave you my word that I would pay you fellows five thousand dollars to keep her out of the hands of the police. I don't go back on my word."

"What good does that do me? The kid has made her get-away."

"You don't expect me to be wearing crape on that account! That's your look-out, if she was clever enough to outwit you."

"Gypsy can't have gone far. Billy'll nail her sure as hell. He'll bring her back."

"All right! If he does, I'll still pay you that money—but if I find that he's hurt her—or if you try to mistreat her in any way—I'll kill you both."

Kane felt certain that the girl would manage to elude her pursuer. She was fleet of foot and quick of mind and she had a good start.

Suddenly it flashed across his mind that that mysterious message might have come from his little friend. That was it! She had been lurking in the bushes. She had seen the two in conversation that was getting altogether too friendly, and she had chosen this means of breaking up their tête-à-tête. Kane could not help chuckling at the feminine ruse. To think of Gypsy delaying her flight in order to make a play against her rival!

There was nothing he could do at that moment to help her. If he started out in pursuit of the girl, Tige would find some means of shadowing him, for in spite of his bandages the big fellow was active and vigorous. The best he could do was to complete his arrangements for the removal of the liquor and trust to Gypsy's luck to get away from that dangerous neighborhood.

Kane entered the barn and found Peter Wilkins descending from the hay loft, puffing like a porpoise.

"Drat that kid!" exclaimed the stableman. "He's as slippery as an eel. Ain't done a lick of work since breakfast, and now he's lit out."

The old man's anger was so sincere that Kane felt sure that Peter Wilkins had not been tipped off by the rum-runners.

"Boys are like that," said Kane. "You can't depend on them. Now, show me where that hooch is stored, and let's figure out how many trips will move it."

In spite of his gnawing anxiety over Gypsy's fate, the young man was able to put his mind on the business on hand, and it was decided that two cars would be sufficient and that the stuff could be transported in two trips for each car.

Presently he went back to the house to find Riggs and discovered the butler moving pompously about the hall as he entered. With his formal manner, his correct garb of service, and his unbending dignity, Riggs appeared to be the complete butler, nothing more.

It was hard to imagine him being engaged in anything so human, not to say picturesque and adventurous, as rum-running. When Kane took him to one side and instructed him as to the details of the expedition, he almost expected to hear the cold voice of the servant reply:

"There must be some mistake, sir."

Instead of that, Riggs agreed without batting an eyelid to take charge of the second car.

"I find that Jenkins can't go with us, sir," he remarked. "Who will travel on my car?"

"You can take Peter Wilkins."

The butler put up a hand that expressed a decided negative. "Pardon me, sir, but a sack of potatoes would be just as useful as that fat sleepy-head! I would have to take my hands off the wheel to keep that old fool from falling out of the car."

"Well, take Billy the Snitch."

"Very well, sir; and who will you take?"

"Oh, I don't know. I can make it alone, I guess."

"What about Tige Moran?"

"But he's all bandaged up."

"That's all right. Tige's as tough as nails. I was talking to him this morning, and he's willing to go."

"How's that? You've been down to the barn talking to them?"

"Certainly. I slipped down for a few minutes to get the lay of the land. I was there when those two rascals discovered that your little friend had escaped."

Kane jumped as if a shot had been fired at his feet.

"What! You know about that, too?"

"About that girl? Certainly, sir!" Riggs did not smile; his face retained the mask-like expression of the perfect butler as he remarked: "There's very little escapes me, sir. I usually know what's going on."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ESCAPE IN SIGHT.

KANE studied those impassive features to find out whether Riggs was inclined to be friendly or hostile. But the butler had a perfect poker face. It was impossible to guess his intentions.

"Well, now that you found out about the girl, I may as well tell you everything, Riggs. The kid is up against it. She had to run away from home because her father abused her, and now she is in danger of getting into jail for a crime that she had no hand in. Even if she is cleared on that charge, she can't escape being sent to the reform school. I'm trying to get her out of this fix. Can I count on you to help me?"

"At least you can be sure that I'll not stand in your way," replied the butler. "I'll not say anything about it. I've got the habit of keeping my mouth shut."

Kane extended his hand impulsively.

"You're a good scout! I believe you've got a good heart, after all. Now, what time had we better start with the first load?"

In discussing the details of the night's work, Riggs showed that he knew the lay of the land perfectly and was ready for all emergencies.

While Kane was reassuring himself that Gypsy was well able to look after herself

and outwit her enemies, the girl was in greater danger than he had any idea of, lurking in the tangled woods a few miles distant and tracked by an infuriated pursuer.

Billy the Snitch had two motives to recapture his prisoner: he was still resentful at having been beaten and humiliated by this girl, and would not be satisfied until he had humiliated her in turn. The other motive was greed. He was bound to get money out of this, either the police reward or the five thousand dollars that Kane had agreed to pay.

As he followed her trail through the brush Billy cursed himself for being too careless earlier in the day. He had thrust her into a disused closet in the barn, a dark hole full of outworn harness and other odds and ends, heavy with dust and cobwebs. He had shot the bolt of the closet door, warning Gypsy that if she made any outcry he would turn her over to the police forthwith.

The only person from whom she could expect help was Peter Wilkins, and the stableman was deceived by a fairy tale that the new stable boy had gone into the woods to shoot squirrels. Billy had framed an alibi for this by hiding the twenty-two caliber target rifle that usually stood in one corner of the barn.

It had not occurred to the bootlegger that the girl could get out from that dark closet without help, for it had no window or other opening but the bolted door. But he had not counted on Gypsy's resourcefulness and persistence.

At first she was stunned and terrified by her imprisonment in this dusty rat hole and crouched helplessly in the dark for what seemed hours.

But she did not whimper. Gypsy was not the sort to give way to tears so readily, and in a few minutes she had passed from despair to hope and determination. The only light that entered her prison was the thin crack of the door. Shaking it gently, she could feel where it yielded to pressure above and below and from the black shadow that cut across the line of light she was able to judge where the bolt was screwed to the outside of the door.

She put her shoulder to the planks, but the bolt, although it was old and rusty, did not promise to yield under pressure. She would have to think of another way.

"Now, ain't that hell!" Gypsy exclaimed, and thrust her hands deep in her overalls pocket, staring at the thin ray of light.

One hand touched the jackknife. At the contact it was like touching a live wire. Here was the way out!

Cautiously, so as not to break the blade, she began whittling a small hole just above the bolt, and in a quarter of an hour at the cost of much labor and a blistered palm she had an opening large enough to admit her finger.

But it was in vain that she tried to reach the knob of the bolt and wiggle it back. The opening was too high. She had not estimated closely enough. Using an expressive word that fitted her new character perfectly, Gypsy dropped to her knees and rummaged among the rubbish on the floor. Sure enough, there was a scrap of baling wire, as might have been expected in an old barn, and from this she formed a small loop and began fishing through the hole, until, after many exasperating failures, she picked up the knob of the bolt.

It took patience, but when that was done the rest was easy. Cautiously she inserted her knife blade in the crack of the door and almost imperceptibly worked back the bolt a hair's breadth at a time.

It seemed as if she had been working at that stubborn piece of metal half a lifetime when at last the door swung open and she was free.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FLIGHT.

THE door of the barn was open. Her escape was assured. Then to her horror she saw moving shadows fall across the sunlight at the door, and she was just in time to shut herself up in the dusty cell as three men came in.

Holding the door tight, Gypsy put her eye to the little hole that she had whittled, and recognized Billy the Snitch, Tige

Moran, and a third man, very sedate and formal in neatly pressed black clothes, who was talking to them with great earnestness.

Her heart was beating so loudly that she could hardly make out what they were saying as they passed across the floor a few rods away. But she caught the name Kane Ryder, and strained her ears to overhear what they were saying about her friend.

Tige grumbled something that she could not understand. Billy vented a torrent of profane epithets at the mention of the name, and the third man quieted him with a cynical laugh and remarked:

"Don't waste any sleep over that poor boob. Doc Ludlow will use him and throw him down hard. Young Ryder is the fall guy."

The men had paused with their backs to her closet door, and to Gypsy it seemed as if the sound of her blood pounding in her temples must betray her to them.

If Billy happened to look that way—if he should observe that the bolt was slid back, although the door remained shut, it would be all up with her plan of escape. She fancied he was turning in her direction, but she gave a great sigh of relief as he led the way upstairs instead.

"Come along up, Riggs," said Billy the Snitch. "We'll have a little shot of hooch while we chew the rag."

As their steps creaked on the stairway that led to Peter Wilkins's quarters, Gypsy again heard a derisive voice saying, "I tell you, he's the fall guy; he won't last long." And the sound of their laughter died away.

Instantly the girl pushed open the door of her prison, stood for a second listening and searching it in every corner for a possible enemy; then she darted out across the floor, ducked into the bushes near the barn, and worked her way among the shrubbery, dodging from the shelter of one bush to another.

She wanted to find Kane. She wanted to warn her friend that he was the "fall guy," and that he had better clear out of that dangerous neighborhood.

If they could only make their get-away together—that would be wonderful! She felt a sudden thrill of joy at that idea.

But as she worked toward the house the voice of her friend, mingling with the voice of some girl, came to her ears with an unpleasant shock, and finally from the heavy foliage of a bush she was able to see Kane and Eunice holding hands and apparently on the happiest of terms.

Her first impulse was to slip away as she had come and leave Kane to look after himself. What better proof did she want—what better proof could there be that she was nothing to him? This other girl, this simpering blond doll, had infatuated him.

But at the thought of those ominous words she had overheard: "He's the fall guy! He won't last long!" she could not bear to leave him without a warning.

Should she whistle to him? Should she call him away from this girl and run a chance of being discovered? No, she would write him a word of warning. Gypsy dug out a stump of pencil from her pocket, emptied the tobacco from its paper wrapping and rapidly wrote her crude message on it.

At the same instant that she tossed it over the bush, Gypsy turned and ran like a rabbit. By the time that Kane had picked it up and read the message, she was several hundred feet away lurking behind a distant bush.

And by the time that Kane had started out in pursuit of her she was well beyond his reach. She was over the wall of the estate and plunging through the woods that led into the Westchester hills, without Kane having caught a glimpse of her.

But now that she was free, where could she go? As Gypsy plunged through the underbrush, frequently stopping to look back and pausing once in awhile to catch her breath, she tried desperately to think of a safe shelter.

Should she hide out in the hills? It was a risky thing to do. The State troopers or the constables might stumble upon her any time.

"Gee! It's hell to have no friends!" she mused with bitterness. "I thought I had a friend a little while ago, but he's no good! He went and threw me down for a pink-faced doll." She had stopped to lean against a tree, a splendid oak, and as she

stood there panting from her climb through the brush her dark eyes became soft and dreamy at the thought of the friend who had proved faithless like all the rest.

"Gee! I thought he was a good kid! I'd have told the world that Kane was on the level. It's lucky I didn't get foolish over him! It's a darn good thing I never fell in love with him."

But abruptly the dreaminess faded from her eyes and they became bright and alert as a wild animal's. Some one was running! Some one was coming only a few yards away!

Gypsy realized that she had stopped to rest only a few paces from a footpath through the woods.

The girl had just time enough to step behind the trunk of the oak when "Billy the Snitch" went along the path at a quick trot.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HUMILIATION.

GYPSY dodged behind the oak tree, seized with a sudden panic at the sight of her pursuer.

She had not made a sound, not the crackling of a twig, but the suddenness of her movement startled a squirrel that was eying her from a branch above her head.

Instantly the little creature scuttled out to the end of the branch where it turned to stare back with beady eyes, excitedly jerking its gray plume of a tail.

At the scratching noise of the squirrel slithering along the dry branch, Billy the Snitch stopped short, whirled in his tracks and caught sight of a patch of color that did not belong.

It was a bit of the striped sweater. It was just the bend of her elbow projecting beyond the tree trunk, but it was enough. The bootlegger knew that he had run down the girl he was pursuing.

Very slowly, moving with infinite precaution so as not to snap a stick or rustle a leaf, Billy stalked his quarry.

The girl listened, hardly daring to breathe. She did not venture to look around the tree trunk, for she had an un-

comfortable feeling that she might have been discovered.

And while she waited there for seconds that seemed hours long, her enemy was sneaking closer and closer, a triumphant grin on his thin lips.

About a yard from the tree, the young ruffian crouched ready for a final spring, but as he did so some sixth sense must have warned the girl, for at the same moment she leaped to one side and instead of catching her arm, his hand grazed the rough bark of the tree.

Now they were at close quarters, with only the broad stem of the oak to protect the girl from his attack.

"I've got you now, you damned little brat!" gasped the Snitch, but as he lunged at her she dodged lightly in the opposite direction, too intent on watching his movement to make any reply.

They played that desperate game for a few minutes, the man frothing and hurling curses at her, the girl tight-lipped and bright-eyed, following his movements with every nerve tense.

It could not last very long, she knew that. There was no cleared way through the brush, nowhere to run except the footpath along which her pursuer had followed her.

Her sharp eyes, darting here and there like a bird's, caught sight of a rough cudgel, a bit of broken branch and she stooped to snatch it.

Instantly Billy was upon her, one outstretched hand grazing her arm, but with a single movement she lifted the stick, brought it down with a crash on his knuckles, dropped it and darted toward the trail.

It was a smart blow, well delivered. It held the ruffian for a second, but instantly he was after her, and Gypsy felt as a rabbit must feel when it hears the panting of a hound at its heels.

Terror lent her speed and for a few moments she gained on him. Yet it was hopeless, she realized, to try to outrun this light-footed, wiry young man.

Abruptly she darted off the trail, scrambled on all fours up to a rough, overgrown rock, and as she reached the top let drive

at her pursuer with a fragment of granite the size of her fist.

He was only a couple of yards away and the stone caught him in the shoulder, halting him for an instant. In that second the girl had gained a foothold on the summit of the rock and now she towered over the rum-runner, balancing above her head a stone so large that she needed all the strength of both arms to poise it, ready to throw.

Her face was pale with fury, her eyes blazing, her lips parted over her teeth in a snarl of defiance. She was too breathless to answer his curses. As Billy edged slowly toward her, keeping his eyes on the mass of rock between her strong little hands, he was foaming like a mad dog, his eyes were full of maniacal hatred.

At the same time he was afraid of her. Suddenly one hand stole round to his hip pocket. He was feeling for his gun.

At that threatening movement, Gypsy let drive with all her force and the boulder went crashing down at her enemy.

The next instant she was gasping and struggling in the arms of the Snitch, who had sidestepped the rock and rushed her before she could regain her balance. Now he was upon her crushing her by his weight, overwhelming her by his strength greater than her own.

In spite of her fury Gypsy was helpless.

Holding her down by the weight of his knee on her chest, her captor jerked loose his necktie, gave the length of silk a twist to make it stronger and with this cord knotted her hands behind her back.

Brutally he jerked the girl to her feet and drove her down the slope to the pathway, not hesitating to cuff her when she stumbled or tried to turn on him.

"Go on, you she-devil!" he snarled, and she felt his heavy hand on her back. "Keep moving! Straight ahead! Follow that path!"

At a brisk walk he forced her ahead of him and once when she stumbled and fell he brought her up with a violent jerk that seemed to wrench her bones apart.

"No tricks, damn you! I'll show you who's boss now!"

In this fashion he drove her for endless

miles, it seemed, to the bruised and humiliated girl, until the footpath entered into a grass-grown roadway.

Above her loomed a sinister structure, the lower story of unsquared stones, the upper of half decayed timbers.

It was the abandoned barn, fit scene for crimes of violence and cruelty, that stood there with its weather-beaten door half open on sagging hinges.

Billy the Snitch took her by the shoulders and thrust her roughly inside. The interior was damp and dark, for the heavy stone walls were pierced by only a couple of small windows.

Too terrified to speak, too breathless and shaken to scream, Gypsy had to submit while the rum-runner tied her with scraps of rope that were hanging over pegs, together with some bits of harness.

"I guess we're square now," he snarled. "I guess I've paid you out for last night's work."

"What are you going to do to me?" Gypsy's eyes stared at her captor in horror. "Are you going to leave me here to starve to death?"

"No, you'll have company all right. I'll be here again to-night with a load of hooch, and if things work out right maybe you'll be turned loose."

The Snitch was looking around for some place to store the girl and finally he dragged her to the farthest corner of the barn, back of an old ramshackle farm wagon. With another length of rope he tied her to the wheel, passing it around her arms and shoulders and wrists so that she was bound like a victim on the rack.

"I guess you won't get out of this place so easy," he growled. "Mind, if you try to make a noise when the gang comes, I'll put a knife to your throat."

He was turning away when a sudden thought struck him. Somebody might pass that way. There was only one chance in a thousand, but he was not taking even that chance of her screaming for help.

Without trying to pamper her with unnecessary gentleness, he gagged her with his pocket handkerchief, then turned on his heel and left her.

The girl's head had fallen sideways and

rested on her shoulder. Everything had gone black around her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UNCONQUERABLE.

THE unconscious girl sagged limply, and only the ropes that tied her to the wagon wheel saved her from falling in a heap on the ground.

How long she remained dead to the world she had no means of knowing. The interior of the barn was in perpetual twilight. She only felt that many hours must have dragged by, when opening her eyes she tried to straighten her cramped and tortured limbs and realized with horror that she was gagged and securely bound to a wagon wheel.

It was not a nightmare after all. Feebly she tried to loosen the strain of the ropes by moving her arms and stiffening her knees, but she was so tightly bound that she could hardly move.

Her eyes searched the darkness despairingly. There was no hope. The old building had been deserted for years, everything was thick with dust and cobwebs and Gypsy realized that she was at the mercy of the rum-runners. Billy the Snitch had said that he and his friends would come back that night. But would they free her, or subject her to even worse tortures? Finally, would they turn her over to the police?

As she strained at her cords in a futile attempt to loosen them, a sound came to her ears that made her heart leap with sudden hope. It was the sound of hoofs crunching on the gravel of the old driveway. Horses were coming at a walk. They were drawing nearer and as the girl held her breath to listen she could hear the low rumble of men's voices.

"Maybe somebody is coming to the barn," thought Gypsy. "Maybe there are workmen or gardeners about the place after all. Oh, God, if I could only make them hear!"

But though she tried to scream through her gag, the inarticulate noises were too faint to carry.

Now the horses had halted just outside

the barn door, she could hear the men talking idly.

"Gee! That's a cheesy old shack! It's a wonder it don't cave in."

"It will some day. It's a couple of hundred years old."

"More likely it will go up in smoke. Some hobo will set the hay on fire with his pipe."

"Is there hay in it, Joe?"

"Yeah! There's some old dirty hay in the loft, bedding for the bums when they roost here."

"Do many hoboes hang out here?"

"Not so many. The place has a bad name. It's said to be haunted."

The other man laughed harshly. "Haunted! That's a good one. I don't take no stock in ghosts, do you, Joe?"

"Not me. But they do say a crazy woman hung herself from the rafters a long time ago. Sometimes you can see her dangling from the end of the rope. I've never seen it myself, but I know a guy who says that he talked to a fellow that seen it."

"Bunk!"

"Well, I guess I'll go in and give it the once over. Maybe there's some tough bird hiding out there now."

Gypsy could hear the creak of leather and the tread of feet as the State troopers dismounted and stood in the doorway.

Carelessly they flashed their lights inside and Gypsy could see the beams dancing in the shadows above her head. In her place back of the wagon she was completely hidden from any one at the doorway and the rays of the flash light did not reach her.

"I'm going to look around in the hayloft, Al," and Joe began to climb the ladder at the other end of the barn.

"All right, if I see that old lady's ghost, I'll sure plug it with my gat."

The man at the door started to whistle softly to himself. With a last frantic effort Gypsy stiffened her whole body, but the only result was a slight rustling sound.

The trooper stopped whistling and pricked up his ears. Gypsy struggled convulsively once more and emitted a smothered moan.

The officer stooped to pick up an old

horseshoe and sent it hurtling over in her corner with a nervous and hasty aim. It crashed among some empty bottles.

"Hell! That wasn't no ghost! This old dump is alive with rats," she heard him say, but he turned to go out of doors crossing himself as he came out of the darkness a moment later.

"Anything in the loft, Joe?" he called, as his companion came down the ladder.

"Not a thing, Al! No ghosts, no bums, no nothin'!"

Gypsy listened as the troopers climbed into their saddles and cantered down the drive.

Big tears were rolling down her cheeks. Much as she dreaded the officers, Gypsy would have been happy to exchange the cords at her wrists for handcuffs and her place of captivity for a cell in the county jail just at that moment. Never before had she yearned to be arrested.

Yet, somehow, the passing of those two men had given her courage. She was not going to give up in despair. She was not like the poor despondent woman who had hanged herself to the rafters. If she had to die she would die fighting.

With renewed energy she wriggled her body against the ropes that held her, and found that she was only scratching her wrists against the rusty iron tire of the wagon wheel. But the roughness of the corroded metal gave her an idea. Painfully she twisted and squirmed until the edge of the tire was bearing on the bonds about her wrist. There was just enough give to allow her to rub the necktie back and forth about an inch or two.

She could hear the soft rasp as the tire frayed the silk, slowly, slowly eating it away a fibre at a time.

That rasping noise was music in her ears.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RANSOM.

WITHOUT warning, there came the sound of brakes and the murmur of voices outside. The cars loaded with cases of contraband had been driven so cautiously, that their gently purring

motors had made hardly a sound and Gypsy realized with a sudden tightening of her heart that the rum-runners were already there.

Although she tugged frantically at the frayed bond that held her wrists, it was not yet worn enough to be broken.

Footsteps were crunching on the gravel; how many she could not tell, and she could hear the rumble of voices. Already at the other end of the barn, men were coming and going and Gypsy could hear the sound of cases being stacked in that corner. The work was going on swiftly by the light of a single small electric lamp.

The girl could see the reflection of its rays, but no light pierced the blackness about her. She strained her ears to hear the voices. Two of them she soon recognized. Tige Moran and Billy the Snitch were well known to her. She thought she also recognized the voice of that formally dressed stranger who had been talking with the bootleggers.

Suddenly her blood raced with an unexpected thrill. From outside the doorway came the tones of another voice, a friend's! Kane!

Apparently he was directing the work from the doorway, giving orders with low, curt phrases, urging the men to work fast, cautioning them to make no noise.

She was saved! Her friend was just outside the door. The girl's heart sang with joy.

But her hope of rescue was dashed in short order. She heard Kane saying: "Shake a leg, boys! We've got to get back for that second load. Come along, Riggs!" And his voice receded as he walked toward the car.

Gurgling and gasping through the gag, she wrenched furiously at her ropes, trying to free herself by one frantic effort. Then she cowered with terror, shut her eyes, and let her head droop as if she had fainted. There was a hasty rustling脚步 behind her, a light was flashed into her deathlike features, and the face of Billy the Snitch was so close above her that the reek of his breath was in her nostrils.

"She's here all right," he snarled in a low voice.

And behind her the grumbling bass of Tige Moran replied: "It's a good job! If she's likely to make a noise, crack her one with the butt of your gun!"

"No need. The kid's fainted. Anyhow, she's gagged good and tight." And with a satisfied grin, Billy hurried outside to rejoin the rest.

Immediately the sound of starting engines and clutches thrown in was heard as the cars drove away.

Now Gypsy set to work in good earnest. Careless of the scratching of the metal on her tender skin, the girl rubbed her hands back and forth on the rusty tire until the fiber grew hot from the friction.

At every stroke it seemed to her that there was just a little more play. The worn fibers were yielding more and more until with a final tug she was able to break the last strands.

But at that she was far from free. Her hands were loose, but she was bound in a dozen places, and the knots would be hard to reach. Worst of all, her muscles were cramped and her arms half numb from the pressure of the cords. She worked her fingers and twisted her wrists to get rid of the stiffness, then painfully she fumbled around until she found a knot that could be picked at.

The harsh rope broke her nails and bruised her fingers, but she persisted until the hempen strands were loosened, and at that she found that her arms were free to the elbow.

Now she could reach another knot that was tied across her chest, but it was hard and stubborn and for a long time she could not untie it in that cramped position. She was working frantically now, for already she imagined that she could hear the throb of distant motors. She must work fast and get out of there before the gang returned. But just as she threw off the ropes that bound her chest to the wheel she realized that the rum-runners were there.

As silently as before they had driven the cars up to the barn and once more they were beginning to unload.

Gypsy was not yet free. She was bound around the ankles by several turns of a rope, and as she reached down to fumble

with a knot she overbalanced and sank to the floor.

Gypsy held her breath for fear the two ruffians had heard her movements. Nobody was paying any attention. She could hear them tramping back and forth with the cases of liquor, and again she strained her ears to catch the sound of Kane's voice. But this time, if her friend was outside the door he was silent.

Then abruptly she heard voices within the barn. Billy the Snitch was saying: "The girl's all right. I'll turn her loose when I see the money, but if I don't get that five thousand dollars I'll hand her over to the cops."

"You'll get the five thousand dollars. But I want to know that Gypsy is all right. Where have you got her?"

"She's not far away. She's within a mile of this place." It was the voice of Tige Moran. "But we've got to see the dough before you see the girl."

"I tell you I'll give you the money. As soon as I get it I'll hand it over to you. My God! What's five thousand dollars compared to Gypsy?"

There was a whistle at the door, and the voice of Riggs cried in low tones: "Here they come, fellows! Here comes the guy that's going to buy your hooch! He got here early enough."

All three men started for the door, and Gypsy could hear the engine of a powerful machine outside.

"Whee! Five thousand dollars!" she thought. "What do you think of that! Kane is ready to pay five thousand dollars to get me out of this fix. Hully gee! I never would have thought I was worth all that!"

Her hands, which had been fumbling at the gag, loosened the knot and slipped it off.

It was a relief to be able to breathe freely, but she did not dare to scream.

Outside the barn there was a murmur of voices that suddenly arose to harsh, snarling cries and curses. There was the rush of many feet, the sound of heavy blows, a confused hubbub like the writhing of savage beasts.

Terrified, the girl crouched there weak

and gasping, waiting for whatever new danger was upon her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TREACHERY.

AS Kane ran from the barn, followed by Tige and Billy, he saw a heavy-set man climbing down from the wheel of a truck without lights. In the obscurity the newcomer's features were shadowed by the visor of his cap, but in the ray of the pocket flash light Kane caught a glimpse of a bulging jaw below a thin-lipped, determined mouth.

"You're early!" said Kane. "Didn't expect you before midnight. But it's all right. The goods are here."

The stranger merely grunted, and four or five shadowy figures in sweaters and shapeless caps leaped noiselessly from the truck and stood behind their leader.

"Let's have the money," said Kane, "and you can load it right away. My men will help you."

He glanced around to see that Tige and Billy were at hand, for there was something menacing and mysterious about that close-mouthed stranger and his silent followers.

Riggs was nowhere to be seen. Kane was sure that he had not gone back into the barn.

"Let's have the money," he repeated, and at that the newcomer thrust a heavy hand in the breast pocket of his coat and with the same movement produced a blackjack that whizzed past Kane's ear. Some instinct had warned the young man to duck.

That mysterious hunch was all that saved his life.

At the same instant the ruffian made a lunge and his crowd of followers were at his heels with slingshots and sections of lead pipe.

But Kane did not lose his head in this surprise attack. With a swift uppercut he stopped the leader of the gang and followed with a swinging left that caught a second gangster in the wind and left him gasping. There was a thud of fists on flesh, the

grunts and growls and curses of men fighting like bulldogs.

Tige and Billy were doing their share, and the three of them struck out fiercely with such good effect that the surprise attack was a failure.

"Back to the barn!" shouted Kane. "Inside, fellows!"

The assailants were not quick enough to get between them and the door. In a second the three men were inside and were bearing all their weight on the clumsy planks.

The attackers crashed against it with fury, and the weather-beaten door creaked and groaned as the defenders jammed their shoulders against it, dug their heels into the ground, and strained every nerve to shut it.

Outside the gang was cursing and raining blows on the oaken boards and, inside, the cornered men were gritting their teeth, too hard pressed to vent their anger in curses. Sweat streamed from their faces—they were fighting with every ounce of their strength.

The door swayed back and forth, trembled, and with a final heave came to rest against the jamb.

With a grunt of satisfaction Kane shoved the bar into place, a tough length of hard-wood, well seasoned and shock-proof.

"Hi-jackers!" he gasped. "Boys, we're up against it! We've got some scrap on our hands!"

"Damned lucky they didn't lay us cold in that first rush! I'll plug 'em! I'll learn 'em not to go up against Tige Moran!"

Billy the Snitch was cursing under his breath. "Where in hell is that yellow double crosser? Where's Riggs? Damn him!"

All three had their guns out by this time.

"Don't waste your shots trying to fire through the door, boys!" cried Kane. "Those planks are hard as iron. You'll need all your cartridges."

He was perfectly cool. Now that the fight was on, he assumed command quite naturally.

"Billy, you go up to the hayloft. From the windows you can shoot right down on those hi-jackers, but don't fire twice from

the same window. Keep moving, or they'll plug you!"

Billy scuttled up the ladder, and Kane continued: "Tige, you and I will have to stay here by the door in case they rush it with a battering-ram. I wonder why they haven't begun shooting?"

"That's easy," growled Tige. "They don't want to bring down any State troopers on us. I'm not keen about seeing them Cossacks myself."

"They're keeping terribly quiet. You don't think they're getting ready to quit, Tige?"

"No chance! More likely they're sneaking around to find some way in. They're saving their shots for the grand rush. But they won't make it. This is the only door and the windows downstairs are too high and too small to get through."

"But the windows are not too small to shoot through. For God's sake, don't put on a flash light, or we're apt to get plugged!"

Outside the barn they could hear only the faint noises of stealthily moving boots on the gravel, and low-pitched voices. It sounded as if the hi-jackers had withdrawn to a little distance. Probably they were scouting around for a good point of attack.

Upstairs there was a creaking sound as Billy crept from window to window to peer out at the besiegers.

Crack! It was a vicious report from the hayloft as the Snitch turned loose his gat. A yell of pain told that he had found his mark, and instantly there was an irregular volley, and the tinkle of broken glass overhead.

Running footsteps in the loft indicated that Billy had ducked and run the instant he fired.

A moment later he let fly from another window, but this time there was no answering shot. Kane could hear scratching and crunching sounds at the back of the barn as if the hi-jackers were gathering there.

The cries of the injured man had suddenly died away into silence. Had he been carried off, or had the wound finished him?

All at once there was a brisk volley

from the back of the barn. The rum pirates were shooting through the rear window of the hayloft. It sounded as if they might have found a ladder and placed it against the wall. Above their heads sounded the sharp *crack, crack* of a pistol, as Billy returned their fire; then they heard his voice in a scream of agony.

"Oh, my God, they got me!" and the thud of his body dropping to the floor.

"Stay by the door, Tige—they may try to rush it!" directed Kane; and he started for the hayloft, reaching the top of the ladder just in time to see a blurred figure outlined against the pale square of a window.

The window was without glass or sash, and the hi-jacker on the ladder had scrambled halfway inside. At the report of Kane's gun there was a hoarse scream, the shadowy figure rocked and swayed and plunged outward. Kane could hear the crash as the hi-jacker struck the ground.

But his moment of triumph was a short one.

Following the crack of his revolver there was a rumble and snort of a motor engine, and almost instantly the building shook with a violence that started the shingles rattling from the roof and brought a shower of dust down upon him. There was a terrific noise of smashing timbers and splintered boards, and Kane, halfway down the ladder by that time, saw a great jagged hole where the door had been.

Tige's revolver was barking shot after shot, and Kane saw answering flashes from the doorway, and turned his gun loose on the attackers as he dropped to the floor. He realized that the game was up, but kept on shooting, nevertheless. While he was doing his best to kill as many of those hi-jackers as he could before they finished him, he felt a certain admiration for their cleverness.

During the attack on the rear of the barn the rest of the besiegers had delivered this assault. They had turned loose a car at full speed against the door—not the truck, but one of the touring cars—and smashed the defense with one blow.

As Kane fired shot after shot at the shadowy figures in the doorway he had

only one hope. Riggs! If Riggs had made his get-away and had succeeded in getting help, there might be some chance of fighting off this pirate gang before they got away with the liquor.

But even as that faint ray of hope gave him a moment's cheer, he had a sensation of being sharply tapped below the collar bone. It was as if some one had flicked him with a lash on the bare skin. And, clutching at the blackness that swam about him, he pitched forward helplessly.

A funny phrase went zigzagging through his mind as he realized that he was hit. "I'm bumped off! So this is what it is like to be bumped off!"

He felt as if he were floating gently in space, sinking down, down into some bottomless abyss.

"Gypsy!" he called faintly. "Don't worry, kid; I'll help you!"

For he imagined that at the end of this plunge into space he saw his little friend, a prisoner of the gangsters.

Suddenly a dazzle of light blinded his eyes, and he shut them against the glare. Blood was gurgling in his throat.

A voice that sounded like something heard in a nightmare was saying: "We've got him, boys! Hustle now, load that hooch and beat it away from here."

It sounded like the voice of Riggs! Feebly, Kane opened his eyes. It was Riggs!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A THOROUGHBRED COURAGE.

TERRIFIED by the battle that crashed about her, Gypsy crouched in the darkness and kept quiet. She was helpless. The ropes that bound her ankles to the wheel hurt cruelly, but she hardly dared to move for fear of bringing a bullet in her direction.

The fusillade stunned her with its sudden fury, and when the door crashed in under the drive of the motor car she thought the barn was falling in a heap on top of her.

Then the end came. She heard Kane's cry of "Gypsy," as he fell. She turned

sick with horror at the certainty that he was killed. But she had no time to give herself up to grief.

The rum pirates were swarming in, thrusting aside the fragments of the door, snatching up the cases of liquor and loading their truck in frantic haste. There seemed to be a large gang. Kane and his friends had been hopelessly outnumbered.

They worked by the rays of a flash light held by their leader.

Gypsy heard some one speaking.

"What about those two boys outside, Mr. Riggs?" asked a hoarse voice.

"The two that were shot? Are they still breathing?"

"No, sir; they were croaked. They'll never be no good no more."

"Drag them inside," directed Riggs. "Get busy with them cases, boys! We've got to tear loose from here."

Frantically, Gypsy began again to wrench and strain at the knots that bound her ankles to the wheel. Her hands were trembling so that she could hardly use them. The ropes cut and bruised her fingers, but she could not loosen them.

From her hiding place she could not see what was going on, but presently there was a sound of dragging weights and the flop of two lifeless bodies dropping to the floor.

Riggs spoke again: "Let's go, boys! We've got the stuff."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Riggs. What about these stiffs in the barn?"

"Well, what about them? They're croaked. They won't make trouble."

"Are you sure they're dead?"

"Sure! Wait a minute. I'll take a look at Billy, that guy up in the hayloft."

Riggs climbed up the ladder, and was down in a minute. "He's bumped off, all right. What's more, I've fixed it so there will be no evidence left for the cops. Let's go!"

Gypsy heard the last of the men running out of the barn.

The truck started off. It put on speed.

At that instant the girl screamed in all the agony of a trapped animal. Overhead the snapping of burning hay and shingles told her how the evidence was to be destroyed.

Riggs had touched a match to the musty hay and rubbish in the loft.

Through the cracks in the floor she could see tiny flashes of red, squirming flames like little serpents. In five minutes the whole loft would be a mass of fire that would crash down upon her as the rafters burned and the roof fell in.

Screaming in horror as the first flames of the burning entered her nostrils, she clawed at the ropes, but only tightened them all the more as she jerked and wriggled and threw herself about madly. The agony was becoming unbearable.

Then there came a faint answer to her scream.

"Gypsy! Gypsy!" moaned a voice that seemed to come from far away. It was like the raving of a fever victim, plaintive, whispering, and repeated again and again. It was Kane.

He was lying there half dead awaiting the same doom that was threatening her. She flung her body about wildly in a paroxysm of despair. With a jerk she pulled back her hand as she recoiled from the slash of something sharp across her fingers and felt the blood gush from the wound.

But that gash from a broken bottle was as welcome as a reprieve at the foot of the gallows.

In her heart she blessed the trooper who had hurled a horseshoe at a ghost and brought this fragment of glass within reach. She snatched it fiercely and, unmindful of the cuts she received, drew it again and again over the cords that held her fast. They parted and dropped away. She was free.

Hobbling and stumbling, the girl ran to the corner where Kane lay, still moaning her name.

The red light from the hayloft shone through the trapdoor. She could see his body crumpled in a puddle of blood. His head was thrown back. His eyes were shut and his lips moaned feebly as he whispered her name.

With her bare hands she sought to check the flow of his blood that spurted between her fingers. Hysterically she shook his shoulders and tried to raise him to his feet.

It was impossible. The shock of that bullet had stupefied him.

Overhead the loft was blazing fiercely, for the dry hay burned with almost explosive fury and sparks began to rain down upon her. She had to get him out of there. She had to work fast.

But he was deaf to her shouts, and as she tried to raise him to his legs his head rolled limply.

A new terror struck the girl like a lash in the face, spurring her to desperation, doubling her strength. It was a sudden whiff of gasoline from the floor. Gypsy understood like a flash what had happened. The car used as a battering-ram had sprung a leak in its gas tank. The gasoline was oozing across the floor.

At any second the flying sparks would explode the vapor and the walls of the barn would be a roaring furnace. In the face of that horror Gypsy's courage and strength arose like a thoroughbred taking a high barrier.

Deftly she slipped her shoulders under the limp body of her friend and stumbled, crouching and swaying blindly, to the door, past the crumpled car, and until she was clear across the roadway her strength did not desert her.

Then she collapsed under her burden and lay gasping and dizzy.

CHAPTER XL.

OLD AGE'S INSURRECTION.

PETER WILKINS had come in for a good deal of "kidding" while Tige and Billy the Snitch were getting away with their last load of hooch. They had heard from Riggs about Dr Ludlow's suggestion to take the fat stableman along, and they chuckled over the butler's retort that old Wilkins would be as useful as a sack of potatoes.

They passed that remark back and forth in the old man's hearing and teased him so unmercifully that at last he was suffering from a real "peeve."

"Goldarned fresh young whippersnappers!" he muttered under his breath. "I'm worth any two of them! At their age I

could have broken them in pieces with my hands! Old as I am, I'm a better man than any of them."

Thus he went grunting and grumbling around the barn, throwing black looks at the two roughnecks.

When they had finally departed with the second load Peter Wilkins still puttered around the place, too indignant to sit down and take it easy.

"Sack of potatoes! Fall asleep on the job! Riggs had no call to say that, the yellow pup! Huh! I'm as lively as a cricket, and if I can't outfight or outwind those young cubs, I can think twice as fast as both of them put together!"

It occurred to him that it would be a good thing to harness up one of the horses to the old buggy that was a survival from the days before the motor car. He would just take a nice little moonlight ride for the fun of it. He would show those birds that he was just as much of a nighthawk as any of them.

Trying to think up some valid excuse for this jaunt, he decided that it would be a good job to scout around and see if he could find a trace of that missing stable boy.

"Fresh little brat!" he grumbled. "He's about as useful on the job as a hair in the butter." Then he chuckled softly: "But, gee—the little devil can sure put up a good scrap!"

Presently he was jogging along, following the road the rum-runners had taken. In spite of his resolutions to show how lively he was, Peter Wilkins had almost fallen asleep over the dashboard, when a roaring engine made him draw the horse to the edge of the road in a hurry, and a great truck came roaring down on him, taking the curve from the old Vandergriff estate on two wheels.

The heavy machine passed him like a comet. Before he had recovered his breath a touring car followed it at such speed that it was no more than a blur before his eyes.

Swearing some of the most picturesque oaths in his vocabulary, Peter Wilkins quieted his frightened horse as best he could and walked it up the long road to

the barn. He expected to encounter his friends, for he knew that this was the place they had chosen to make that deal with the purchaser of the liquor.

But as he went farther along into the shadows of the disused road, a glow above the treetops made him touch the horse with the buggy whip. Those wild roughnecks had managed to set the old barn on fire!

As the stableman flicked his horse on the flanks, he grumbled some choice expletives at the recklessness of Tige and Billy the Snitch. "The old barn ain't worth a hill of beans!" he said to himself. "Just the same, they shouldn't get gay with other folks' property. Danged young whelps!"

Not until he was almost in front of the barn did he realize that something was seriously wrong. The upper windows were belching smoke, the roof was aflame, and in the glare Peter Wilkins could see a motor car jammed halfway into the door of the burning barn.

Just as he scrambled out to investigate, a slender figure staggering under a man's body plunged out of the doorway, partly blocked by the car, and frantically began dragging the helpless burden across the road.

* Peter Wilkins recognized Gypsy by that unmistakable striped sweater. The wounded man he was not so sure of, but he thought it was Kane Ryder. He had no time for a second look. Hardly had he recognized them when there was a fierce leap of flames from the doorway, and with a muffled explosion and a mushroom of fire and smoke the car that was halfway inside exploded its gas tank.

At that the whole lower floor of the barn became a great seething volcano with flames leaping from every opening, while the roof sent up fiery tongues that carried sparks and burning shingles toward the stars.

Peter Wilkins was beside the wounded man in a second, hurling questions at Gypsy. For a few moments she lay there stupefied, the breath whistling through her nostrils as if she had been making a quarter mile dash. She was all in. Even when she revived she was too frantic to answer his questions coherently.

"It's Mr. Ryder," she gasped. "He's hurt awful bad. Help me get him away from here."

All the time she was feverishly bandaging Kane's wound below his collarbone with strips of his shirt.

"God A'mighty! What's the matter—what's happened?" Peter Wilkins was stammering futile questions, but at the same time was helping to lift Kane into the buggy. "Where's Tige? Where's Billy?"

"They're dead! Croaked! Bumped off! Done for! There was a fight and the rest are killed. Drive like hell and get help for Kane, or he'll be a dead one, too."

Under the urgency of Gypsy's commands Peter Wilkins did not stop to argue it out with his new stableboy. Instead of that he applied the whip to his horse's flanks, and the buggy swung homeward at reckless speed, lurching into the ruts and plunging over the loose stones.

Gypsy held her friend's head against her breast, trying to ease the rough going by pillowing him on her young body.

"That's right," she urged Peter Wilkins. "Drive like mad! If Kane dies from this, I'll want to die, too!"

CHAPTER XLI.

DEVIOUS WAYS.

LASHING his horse furiously through the night, old Peter brought the wounded youth and the girl to the gate of Dr. Ludlow's estate; but as he urged the horse up the driveway to the house, Gypsy cried:

"No! No! Stop at the barn!"

"What the—" The stableman turned a startled face toward her and asked: "Don't you want to take him to the doctor?"

"No, not Dr. Ludlow. Stop at the barn and put him to bed in your room. I don't dare trust him with that gang of murderers."

She laid a firm hand on the reins and drew the horse up sharply at the stable door, and helped carry the disabled man upstairs.

The two of them stripped Kane to the

waist, examined and washed his wound, and found that the bullet had gone right through him and made a clean puncture. Peter Wilkins declared that it had passed too high to penetrate the lungs.

"I'm a first-class vet," he bragged as he applied bandages and antiseptics. "I've got a framed diploma," he added. "When I was a young feller there was no better veterinary surgeon in the State."

"Why, that's just a horse doctor!" Gypsy exclaimed contemptuously.

At that the old man bristled. "Let me tell you, boy. An A-1 hoss doctor knows a dang sight more than a lot of these here college boys that calls themselves M.D.'s. And specialties! They only learn enough at college to doctor an earache or a stiffness in a knee joint; and so they have the gall to say they ain't all-around doctors, but *specialties*, they calls themselves. Bunk! That's what their specialty is."

Peter Wilkins was so proud at being allowed to attend to the wounded man that he did not insist on calling Dr. Ludlow. When Kane had been well bandaged and cared for, Gypsy explained how Riggs had led the hi-jackers and caused the death of Tige Moran and Billy the Snitch.

"Riggs thought that Kane was dead, too. It was Riggs set the barn on fire. I heard him say that he was going to destroy the evidence."

In this disconnected manner Gypsy brought out the story of the battle at the old barn, while Peter Wilkins sat there with his jaw sagging and his eyes protruding.

"Don't that beat hell!" he exclaimed. "So it was Riggs that tipped off the hi-jackers and double crossed Dr. Ludlow?" He slapped his thigh as the truth dawned on him. "Now I see why Kane Ryder was put in charge of that job. Doc must have been suspicious of Riggs—you know in the last couple of months the hi-jackers have been holding up doc's boys and taking away their hooch. That's happened several times. I bet it was Riggs that tipped them off right along. You know he's got a wireless outfit at the house."

"So you think that doc put Kane in charge of this job because he was suspicious of Riggs. I thought maybe the doctor

had framed the whole thing to get Kane out of the way. Something tells me that the doctor has it in for him. And that he'd stop at nothing if he wants to get rid of a man."

"Yeah! That's right! Doc is a hard man to go up against—and slippery as an eel!"

"So you see, we've got to keep Kane out of sight here. Don't let anybody know what's happened. If Riggs believes that Kane was killed and that all the bodies were burned to ashes, he's apt to show up here again."

"That's so! He'd have enough nerve to come back. He'd say that he was the only man who escaped from that gun fight."

As there was no love lost between Wilkins and Riggs, the stableman was only too glad to lend himself to this plot by keeping the wounded man in his own quarters where no one had occasion to enter.

Gypsy's guess had been a good one.

Just at the time she and Wilkins were bandaging Kane's wound, the butler was making his way toward the big house with his face scratched and blackened, his clothes torn and having all the appearance of being the survivor of a fierce battle.

He had jumped off the truck about a mile from the estate; after making sure that the stolen liquor would be properly disposed of. After having torn his clothes and rolled in the dirt, he drew enough blood by superficial scratches to afford a good imitation of a wounded hero. Then Riggs dashed to the house with every appearance of excitement. At the sound of his entrance into the hall, the doctor hurried out of his study.

"It's all up, doc," cried the refugee. "The hooch is captured. Tige and Billy and your secretary were killed."

"My God!" The doctor staggered and then looked at Riggs with more hatred than sympathy. "And what about yourself? Are you badly injured?"

"I don't think so! It's a miracle! Bullets went through my clothes. We were surprised by hi-jackers, a big gang. They cornered us in the barn and we had no chance."

Dr. Ludlow was pale. The loss of eighty thousand dollars was a serious mat-

ter. He could hardly believe the bad news at first, but Riggs drew him to the window and pointed to the red glow in the sky.

"There goes the old barn. It must have caught fire when the hi-jackers shot into the hay loft. It had started to burn when I made my get-away." And Riggs explained how he had sneaked out at an unguarded opening when he saw that the battle was hopeless.

"What about the cars?" the doctor asked suddenly. "Did you put on the phony number plates so that they can't be traced to me?"

"Sure, that was attended to before we started. There won't be any evidence to pin that bootlegging on to you."

"I think I'll drive across and look over the ground," said the doctor at last. "You get washed and change your clothes and come right along. That is—" he gave the other man a searching look—"unless some of your hurts are serious."

Riggs made a pretense of examining his scratches and feeling his bones. "No, I can go with you!" he said. "I'm just a little hurt!"

An hour later the two men stood by the structure which had burned to a mass of embers inside of the stone walls. A couple of state troopers and a few onlookers were watching the flames die away. They greeted the doctor respectfully, recognizing him as one of the important land owners of that section. No effort had been made to save the worthless building.

"You can see for yourself, doctor, that there is not a trace of those men left. Nothing that would identify them or bring the job back to you," whispered Riggs.

The doctor was convinced. He felt fairly safe. But there was one thing which made him uneasy. He distrusted Riggs. There was not a grain of evidence against the man, but there had been a number of losses from hi-jackers of late and somehow the doctor felt a vague suspicion that Riggs might have double crossed him.

And now in this first big job when Riggs was compelled to take orders from a new comer, this catastrophe had happened.

Dr. Ludlow decided to say nothing, but keep a sharp eye on that man in the future.

If Riggs was a traitor there would be a swift and terrible punishment in store for him!

CHAPTER XLII.

ALL GIRL.

THE "Fight to the Death in Abandoned Barn," made a wonderful story for the newspapers. It was given plenty of space as other news happened to be rather tame and scarce that week.

As there were no witnesses available, the reporters could draw freely on their imagination, so in their stories, shots rang out in the night, blood flowed by bucketfuls and corpses littered the landscape. Some papers called it a vendetta war; others guessed hi-jackers and bootleggers.

Kane Ryder read several days' output altogether on the morning when he was allowed to sit up in Peter Wilkins's bed, propped about with pillows.

He smiled at the earlier stories, but the latest ones gave him something to look serious about.

He was identified! His eyes widened as he read that one of the corpses was identified as that of Kane Ryder, formerly secretary of Dr. Ludlow.

Kane read on, then called Gypsy to see what she made of all that.

"Look here, Gypsy! Read this! It says that Dr. Ludlow identified one of the bodies as mine. He says that he knew it by the dental work. Why, that fakir never looked at my teeth. Never! He doesn't know whether I ever had a filling or not."

Gypsy grabbed the paper and gave a little cry of rage. "It gets worse and worse the farther it goes. Gee, boy! I hope you're strong enough to stand the shock." And Gypsy reading with the painful effort of a schoolboy in class, brought out the "New Light on Ludlow Gem Theft."

Dr. Ludlow regretted to speak ill of the dead, but the young man had been wild, very wild. He had been running with a bad crowd and instead of taking the opportunity to reform, he had gone back to his own associates bootleggers and other lawbreakers.

The night of the robbery, so Dr. Ludlow stated, the young man had come in after the household had retired. The gem robbers entered about that time. The room next to his had been used by the burglars in escaping with their loot. Major Fester had been killed by the criminals while gallantly resisting them.

In spite of his reluctance to blacken the memory of his former secretary, Dr. Ludlow piled up a mountain of evidence against the victim of the battle in the barn.

Kane's eyes began to snap and his jaw set with determination. "When it comes to dirty work, this is the world's worst!"

"Can you beat that!" cried Gypsy. "Trying to frame a dead man. That guy is worse than a stool pigeon! I can't say no more than that! A stool pigeon would class as a good sport alongside of that bird!"

She went to the bedroom door and called Peter Wilkins. "Hey, look here! Have you seen what's in the paper?"

The stableman came shuffling in with a bowl of chicken soup and asked mildly: "What's the latest? Spill your dirt!"

"It's about Kane. They're trying to pin that murder and robbery on to Kane."

"Who is?"

"Doc Ludlow."

"Well, I'm not surprised." Wilkins set down the bowl of soup and scanned the paper, then handed it back. "It's just like doc," he observed. "Tricky as they make 'em! Never passes up any bets!"

"He's a yellow dog," stormed Gypsy.

"He's a polecat!" Wilkins corrected her. "And them polecats are good at crawling through a little hole and stealing eggs."

"Well, I'm going to put a stop to this," Kane declared, bracing himself up on his elbows, but the pain from his wound dropped him back again with a groan.

"There, there, boy, lay still!" The stableman quieted him. "Don't get rattled! Don't do nothin' rash! You just lay low and say nothin'!"

"I'm to say nothing while my name is spread in the papers as a burglar and a murderer?"

"You think Kane's going to take it lying down?" cried Gypsy, her eyes blazing.

"Now listen here, you two!" said Wilkins, touching a match to his old cob pipe which had gone out. "Don't get fussed and don't get riled! You're in luck if you only knew it. Doc thinks you're dead and the police think so, too. Nobody's on your trail."

"But I can't stay here forever. Sooner or later I've got to get out of here."

"Take your time, boy! Take your time! Just stick right here until Doc Ludlow has said his little say. You'll see it in the papers every day. When he gets through piling on the lies about you, you'll find that he's said a dang sight too much. You'll be able to shoot his story full of holes."

"There's something in that."

"There's a lot in it! Give him rope, boy! Give him plenty of rope and he'll be all snarled up so that he'll not be able to unsnarl himself."

"But you are sure that Kane is safe, here in the barn?" Gypsy interrupted. "You don't think that any one will come here to search the place?"

"What searchin' was to be done, is all over. Day after the fight, Dr. Ludlow and Riggs was rummaging around in the hayloft. They wanted to make sure that no sign of bootleg was left in the place. All they found was a couple of empty bottles and they went away satisfied. They won't come back no more."

"All right," said Kane. "I'll stay here and keep quiet until the doctor has talked himself into a hole. Anyhow I'll stay here until I'm strong enough to do something."

"That's the way to talk, boy! You'll be well in no time. Nothin' like a first class vet. with a diploma to make you strong and hearty."

"I don't know why you're takin' so much trouble for me," said Kane. "My own father couldn't have done more."

Peter Wilkins looked sheepish and began to edge toward the door.

"It ain't altogether because I think a lot of you, Mr. Ryder," he explained. "There's another reason. The fact is," he hesitated at the door and spoke from the kitchen, "to tell you the truth I've taken a liking to that sassy little she-devil dressed up like a boy!"

Kane started guiltily, but Gypsy, with a cry of rage, picked up the bowl of chicken soup and hurled it through the doorway. It crashed upon the rusty old cook stove, and the sound of its shattering mingled with the loud guffaws of Peter Wilkins.

He stuck his head in the door, made sure that she was not going to let fly with a second missile and observed, to his astonishment, that she was brushing away tears.

"Never mind, kid, you had me fooled for awhile," he soothed her.

"Go way! I hate you!" she retorted.

"I'll say you made a hell of a fine boy!" persisted the stable man, shoving closer and extending a hand to pat her shoulder. "I'd never have guessed that you were anything but a boy, and a tough one, too, only I seen you last night doing something that no boy would be up to."

"Always sneakin' around—" Gypsy shot back angrily.

"Now for that I *will* tell," chuckled the old man. "Just for that I'll tell right out in meetin' how you was kissing this young fellow and patting his face when he was asleep."

Wilkins grinned, looking for an answering smile from his friends, but Kane's face had grown very grave.

Gypsy buried her face in her crossed arms and began to sob. There was not the slightest doubt that she was all girl.

CHAPTER XLIII.

GROPING.

THAT same morning Lieutenant Kearney was discussing with Dr. Ludlow the latest developments of the gem robbery. Kearney was spurred to fresh exertions by his ambition to achieve the glory of solving this baffling case; also by the rewards which by now had reached a tidy sum.

The guests who had been robbed had offered individual rewards for the return of their property. A certain semi-public committee for the enforcement of the prohibition law, had offered the sum of five thousand dollars for the discovery of Major Fester's murderer, "alive or dead."

It developed that while posing as a government officer the major in reality had been an agent of this committee. In a high-handed manner that was typical of his usual methods, he had assumed an authority to which he was not entitled. But the five thousand dollars was offered by the committee, and there were rumors that it was to be doubled.

Altogether there was a total of more than fifteen thousand dollars' reward and Lieutenant Kearney's fingers closed greedily whenever he thought of that nice little roll.

"It's a good thing I've got a lead that points to young Ryder," remarked Kearney rolling a black cigar about in his mouth. "It was my theory from the first that that bird was the ringleader of the gang. One reason I'm glad I have the facts on Ryder is that Grimshaw has got to be turned loose."

"You don't think Grimshaw did the killing?" asked Dr. Ludlow.

"No! We had that boy on the carpet. We sweated him for forty-eight hours, and we couldn't get a damn thing out of him. He pretty near went bats. Toward the last he was crying like a baby and begging us to let him alone and get a little sleep. What with that wound and the grilling, he was a wreck. But stubborn as a mule! The boys done their best, but they couldn't get a thing out of him."

"So you'll have to let Grimshaw go?"

"Yeah! But I don't mind it so much now that we've got evidence on young Ryder."

"You've got a good lead there," said the doctor. "But not enough evidence. Worst of all you haven't got the jewelry. However, anything I can do to help—"

"Have you got any letters, Dr. Ludlow, or any other papers that would give us a line on the young fellow's friends. I think we might nab that Jane that he let into the house if we could get a line on his friends. Her clothes were found and pawed over by a lot of detectives, but so far they haven't helped none. Ain't there any papers in Ryder's room, or a note book with addresses or anything like that?"

"Go on upstairs and go through his

room with a fine tooth comb," suggested the doctor. "Empty out his trunk and go through the pockets of his clothes, look under the carpet and open the upholstery of his chairs. You may find something, who knows! Many a mystery has been solved by some trifle that was overlooked by the criminal."

Lieutenant Kearney went up to Kane's room, determined to leave no square inch of it unsearched. He rummaged in the trunk and bureau drawers, read every letter he could find, carefully examined every book and magazine, looking for marks on the fly leaves or papers concealed in the bindings. There were two or three cards and a snapshot stuck in the mirror of the young man's dresser. He carefully pocketed these as possible leads.

His heart thrilled with the hunter's joy as he discovered a telephone number written in pencil on the wall. He found a paper of matches with the name of a Broadway restaurant printed on the cover and decided to question the proprietor and waiters. He examined every article of clothing, felt in the shoes and tapped the heels to see that they were not hollow. He rummaged in the bathroom, and emptied out the contents of bottles and boxes.

He poked between the mattresses of the bed, felt the quilts and cut open the pillows for any objects that might be hidden in the stuffing. He looked back of pictures and took up the carpet. In fact, all the methods of a thoroughgoing and determined sleuth were put into practice by Lieutenant Kearney.

At the end of three hours he mopped his brow and decided to call it a day. Disgustedly he chewed the frayed end of his cigar. What he had found was a dozen or more addresses which might or might not result in fresh evidence; the snapshot of Kane taken with a girl in the shade, an extremely blurry photograph—but he had not found any certain clew. Worst of all, there was not a trace of the loot which he so ardently coveted.

Riggs came to the door, tapped discreetly and said: "Lunch is served lieutenant. Dr. Ludlow sent me to ask whether you would join him."

The servant stared with surprise and a trace of cynical amusement at the room which looked as if a Kansas cyclone had swept through it. Clothing was scattered about the floor, furniture was upset, drawers were open and the whole litter was covered with a sprinkling of feathers from one of the slashed pillows.

"Did you find anything, sir?" asked Riggs.

"No, damn it!" growled the lieutenant. "Yes, here's something that looks pretty good. A snapshot of young Ryder and a girl. I bet ten dollars it's the jane he let into the house that night."

Riggs studied the snapshot with a puzzled expression and then a grin stole across his face, which he tried to conceal with his hand. "Beg pardon, sir," he said. "That's Miss Eunice, sir."

"Damn such rotten luck!" blurted the lieutenant, taking out the cigar stub from his mouth and jamming it into the ash tray with such a vicious sweep of the arm that the stand tottered on its heavy base and crashed to the floor.

The accumulated ashes and cigarette butts of a week scattered in every direction as the glass container rolled in a corner, but Lieutenant Kearney gave vent to a loud cry of satisfaction.

In the scatter of cigarette ends lay a little coil of white beads.

It was a necklace of small but perfectly matched pearls!

CHAPTER XLIV.

A TOO LUCKY MAN.

WHEN Lieutenant Kearney came down to the dining room his round, heavy face was beaming with suppressed triumph. In his coat pocket was a costly piece of stolen jewelry. More important than its value in dollars and cents was its value as evidence.

This discovery would certainly clinch it. Kane Ryder was the thief. And he, Lieutenant Kearney, had made the discovery single handed.

He felt that he had earned a lunch and hoped that it would be a good one.

Eunice was not there. She had gone into town to take luncheon with Mrs. Van Alstyne.

To his surprise he found that Mrs. Anstruther was seated with the doctor at the table, and he bowed to the former beauty of the chorus with clumsy gallantry.

"At last Mrs. Anstruther is quite herself once more," observed Dr. Ludlow suavely.

"Happy to see you up and about again, ma'am," said Kearney.

The lady bowed her acknowledgments with a rather puzzling smile, and Dr. Ludlow continued: "As she has quite recovered from her attack of hysteria and nervous breakdown, I believe that it would be quite all right to let Mrs. Anstruther go home whenever she cares to."

The lieutenant cleared his throat dubiously at this, but the doctor went on.

"Of course, an experienced officer like yourself does not give too much weight to outbursts of a woman suffering from hysteria. You remember, lieutenant, that she said something wild that sounded suspicious at the time. But now that we have so much evidence pointing to young Ryder, I think we can dismiss this lady from the case."

"Yeah! I guess you're right. My feeling all along was that she had nothing to do with it. In fact I was dead certain from the first that your secretary was the man that we were looking for."

Mrs. Anstruther smiled rather acidly and remarked: "Thank you!" The look she gave Lieutenant Kearney was one of veiled contempt, but the glance she shot at Dr. Ludlow was full of suppressed hatred.

"Well, lieutenant, what did you find in Ryder's room?" asked the host. "You've had time to make a scientific search of the place."

"I searched it all right and as usual I got results." The lieutenant laid down his knife and fork, reached in his coat pocket and exclaimed: "There's an eye-full for you! What do you think of that now?"

"The pearl necklace!" Dr. Ludlow leaned over and studied the dangling string of pearls with every appearance of satisfaction.

"Congratulations, lieutenant! That's

splendid!" He touched the buzzer and, as Riggs appeared, called out jovially: "Bring up a quart of champagne. We are going to drink Lieutenant Kearney's health. He has found Miss Eunice's necklace!"

"Oho! This necklace belongs to Miss Eunice, does it? Yes, I remember now, it was your daughter who lost the pearls."

The doctor took the necklace and studied it carefully. "Yes," he said, "these are the ones. There isn't a doubt of it!" As he dropped the jewels into his own pocket he added casually: "What a pity that I had neglected to offer a reward for their return. I was so upset by all this excitement that I simply forgot to put up a reward."

Kearney stared at him blankly.

"Hard luck, lieutenant! But I'll slip you something anyway."

But Mrs. Anstruther gave vent to a harsh and grating laugh. "Dr. Ludlow seems to have all the luck!" she observed.

Her host looked at her indignantly, but the lady continued unabashed: "Now if you had only found my emeralds, Lieutenant Kearney, we would have both been in luck. I'd have the jewels which are worth ten times as much as these pearls, and you'd get a nice little piece of change, five thousand dollars, no less."

"Do you mean to insinuate anything?" asked Dr. Ludlow, pale with anger, while the lieutenant stared wide-eyed, first at one and then at the other.

"Insinuate! I should say not! All I said was that it's a very interesting coincidence that the only jewelry that is found is your daughter's property. You are getting it back without even handing over a reward."

"Well, what of it?"

"Nothing, my dear doctor, except that you are a very lucky man. I only hope your luck will continue." Mrs. Anstruther arose from the table. "I don't believe I'll eat any lunch. If I stay here any longer I may get hysterics again."

At the door she turned with a sardonic smile. "Good-by, Dr. Ludlow! Thank you for your hospitality! Good-by, Lieutenant Kearney, I congratulate you on your detective work."

She was gone.

The two men could hear her light laughter as Mrs. Anstruther ascended the staircase.

"What do you think of that, doctor," asked Kearney in an undertone. "Is that dame getting the high-strikes again?"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE FEMININE HAND.

D R. LUDLOW filled the glass of Lieutenant Kearney with champagne and the two men drank in celebration of the detective's discovery.

But as soon as his glass was empty Kearney filled it and kept the bottle beside his plate. Also he attacked his food with unusual energy and the doctor smilingly congratulated his guest on his good appetite.

"It ain't that I'm as hungry as all that," retorted Kearney ungraciously. "Seein' as I've been done out of a reward for that pearl necklace, I'm entitled to a square feed. That's the least I can expect."

"Oh, come now, don't get off on the wrong foot," expostulated Dr. Ludlow. "Here," he fished in his wallet and produced a one hundred-dollar bill. "Honestly, I'd like to slip you ten times as much, but I've been pretty hard hit lately and a hundred dollars is all I can afford."

Considerably mollified, the lieutenant tucked away the currency and went on with his lunch.

"We may as well let the newspapers have this latest development," continued the doctor. "The finding of the necklace in Kane's room makes it practically certain that he was in with the gang. Probably he was the ringleader. There is no reason why you should not get plenty of newspaper publicity out of this. Then there is the reward for the murderer of Major Fester. If you can prove that Ryder did it, you get five thousand dollars. It was offered for the murderer, dead or alive."

The friends were interrupted by the sound of a motor in the driveway and the doctor looked out of the window.

"I see Mrs. Anstruther telephoned for

her car," he remarked. "She didn't waste any time. I'll go out and say good-by to the lady."

At the front door he encountered her, followed by her maid with the traveling bags.

Dr. Ludlow advanced with his usual courtesy, but the woman wheeled upon him fiercely.

"You certainly have your nerve," she observed bitterly. "To think I would shake hands with you!"

"But my dear lady—"

"Oh, can that! I was a chorus girl before I was a lady—and believe me a chorus girl has to be a good scrapper! I learned to look out for myself in those days and I haven't forgotten how."

"Is that a declaration of war, Mrs. Anstruther?"

"You said something, old dear! War it is! And before I'm through with you, you sneaking pussy foot, you're going to discover that war is hell!"

With a vindictive scowl upon her handsome face, the former Broadway beauty swept down the stairs and into her car.

Slightly uneasy in spite of his outward calm, Dr. Ludlow shrugged his shoulders and went back to finish his luncheon. He had good reason for his uneasiness. Mrs. Anstruther had put up many a stiff battle against the male parasites who prey on the women of the stage. More than one sleek pursuer of feminine charms had felt the weight of her fist. Others she had worsted by weapons more suited to her sex, but on one occasion she had used a revolver on a wealthy admirer who had not been square in his dealings with her.

Altogether, Flora Anstruther was not an enemy to be despised.

Her first move after reaching home was to get in touch with a private detective agency. She was willing to pay liberally for a complete record of Dr. Ludlow's past career. If there was something shady in that man's past she was ready to seize upon it as an instrument of revenge.

Then reading in the newspapers of Grimshaw's release for want of evidence against him, she sent for the unfortunate young man and had him brought to her house, for

he was not only broke, but in a wretched condition from his wound and from the grilling that he had received.

However, there was not much information to be had from that source.

"Do you really think that Kane Ryder killed Major Fester?" the lady asked him.

At that the ex-service man went right up in the air. "I should say not! I knew that boy well. He was as straight as they make them. This attempt to blacken his reputation makes me wild."

"I think there is something fishy back of all this. And I am going to find out! Have you any idea who committed the robbery and did the killing?"

"No, but I am sure that it wasn't Kane Ryder. Aside from that I haven't even a guess."

"Well, I have," snapped Mrs. Anstruther. "I think that simpering pink and white doll, Eunice Ludlow, is not nearly as innocent as she looks. She was always leading the major on to do foolish things. Perhaps she tempted him to go too far and they had a quarrel that lead up to a killing. Such things have happened."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all! I pretty nearly killed a man once," said Mrs. Anstruther very coolly. "Women are not as soft as they look, my young friend."

"Oh, but I can't believe such a thing of Eunice Ludlow! She is so gentle and kind. She is always doing things for people, helping out girls that need a friend. No; Eunice couldn't possibly have done anything to cause the major's death. But as for her father—well, he's a different proposition."

"I'm going to get the straight of this anyhow! I'm willing to spend money and take a lot of trouble to get the inside dope on that gem robbery." She knitted her brows thoughtfully for a moment and then continued: "What I want is somebody working for me in Dr. Ludlow's household. Isn't there some one we can get on our side?"

"That's a good idea. I think you might get a line on Dr. Ludlow's affairs if you pump some of the servants," Grimshaw suggested. "Some of them have been with him for years, and know all about him."

"Which ones could I approach?" asked Mrs. Anstruther. "How about Riggs?"

"No, I don't think you could get Riggs to open his mouth. He's a regular clam—yes, he likes money all right, but I don't think you can buy him. I have a hunch that Riggs is a sort of partner in the doctor's crooked work!"

"What about Jenkins, the watchman?"

"Jenkins is a faithful old fool. He doesn't know much and the little he knows he would never tell for love or money."

Grimshaw reflected, then said: "I'll tell you a good lead. Try old Peter Wilkins, the stable man. He's been working for Doc Ludlow for ten years or more. I think the doctor has some sort of a hold over him, but I've also heard that the old codger is very sore because he has been ignored in the last year or two. He's been shoved aside for men like Riggs and Jenkins. That was common gossip among the servants. I think you would get next to old Wilkins by spending a little money."

"I'll do it," said Mrs. Anstruther. "I'll have him come to the house."

"I don't know whether he'll do that. He might be suspicious. What's more, old Peter is so lazy you can hardly make him move around. The best way is to go there yourself. He'll be so flattered by a visit from a beautiful woman in silks and diamonds that you'll be able to wind him around your little finger."

"He wouldn't be the first," the lady replied with a light laugh. "But what excuse can I have for going there?"

"Let me think! Oh, I know. Wilkins kids himself that he's a wonderful vet. Now you tell him that one of your saddle horses has been off his feed for a long time and the experts are unable to cure him. Tell him that you heard he was the best horse doctor in the country, and you need his help. After that he'll eat out of your hand."

Within a week from the time she had issued a declaration of war to Dr. Ludlow, Mrs. Anstruther was sitting beside the stove in Peter Wilkins's quarters drinking tea out of his best cracked cup and dazzling the old man by her charm and the musical clink of gold.

She had paid him a liberal fee for diagnosing the ailment of an absolutely mythical horse, Twinkle Toes, by name. She had read up all about the maladies of equines in a text book and Peter Wilkins was given an earful of symptoms.

"My, my! That's terrible!" he sighed. "If it wasn't for my rheumatism I'd go right over and look at that horse myself."

"Then you can do nothing for him? Must the poor creature die?" There were tears in Mrs. Anstruther's eyes.

"No, lady, I'll fix up a prescription for him—it's a stem winder, if I do say it myself. Good for animals—and humans, too, in moderation."

Mrs. Anstruther felt as if she had broken the ice on her first visit. "I'll come again soon and let you know about Twinkle Toes," she said. And in parting she gave him a smile that swept the old man into her train of abject admirers.

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN ENEMY TERRITORY.

"I THINK you are perfectly wonderful, Mr. Wilkins!" exclaimed Mrs. Anstruther. "Why, a man with your genius for curing sick horses ought to be at the head of a big business."

Two days after her first visit to the old stable man Mrs. Anstruther had returned to announce the cure of her favorite saddle horse, Twinkle Toes. The fact that it existed only in her imagination made it possible for the cure to be so rapid.

"So the horse is all right," replied Peter Wilkins, beaming with pride. "I knewed it! That prescription works like a charm."

"It's amazing, Mr. Wilkins! All the grooms are delighted because Twinkle Toes was their favorite and they had given up all hope."

"Them young fellers can't handle horses the way us old timers can," Wilkins admitted.

"And my head groom said it would have been worth thousands to him if he had known about you before."

"There ain't a better horse doctor alive, if I do say it myself!"

"I'll say so! It's a shame that you are not appreciated here. A man with your ability should draw a large salary and have a house of his own to live in. I don't think Dr. Ludlow realizes what a treasure he has."

"Well, I ain't complainin', but I ain't exactly pleased to see how strangers come in and take the places that should rightfully go to us old employees. Take Riggs now! Of course, I couldn't be a butler—I don't know any more about butling than a rabbit. But I could attend to doc's business for him better than that upstart, or I'll eat my hat."

"Of course, you could." Mrs. Anstruther was all sympathy. "And Mr. Ryder! He was another new man who was displacing the older ones."

"Don't say nothing against young Ryder," said Peter Wilkins vehemently. "He's a fine fellow—I mean he *was* a fine fellow! Straight as they make them. Yes, lady, Kane was a prince!"

"Then you don't believe what the newspapers are saying about him?"

"Newspapers! Huh!" The old man snorted with profound disgust. "Lemme tell you, ma'am, they're all wrong!"

"I'm glad you feel that way about Ryder. I had taken quite a fancy to the boy myself." She leaned forward and touched Wilkins's fat knee with her dainty forefinger. "What are we going to do to clear that boy's reputation?"

"Goshamighty, lady! You've got me there! I'd only like to know how to go about it."

Although he was delighted at the friendship of this dazzling stranger, Wilkins was altogether too cautious to confess that Ryder was in the next room, recovering from his wound.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Wilkins, it was over the scandalous stories about Mr. Ryder that I quarreled with Dr. Ludlow."

"You quarreled with Dr. Ludlow! Gosh, lady, that's bad! He's a hard one to go up against!"

"I know it! That's why I'm going to need the help of some brave, intelligent and vigorous man to solve the mystery—I only wish I dared count on you. I've never

seen a man whose ability and brains and courage impressed me so much."

"Well, thank you very kindly, ma'am," stammered Peter. "I'm afraid you are just being kind to a poor old man."

"Old! Why, you're in the prime of life! A man at your age is worth ten of these callow youngsters who believe that they know it all."

"Have some more tea, ma'am—and don't spare the sugar, there's plenty more," ejaculated the stable man.

As she accepted graciously, he added: "I'll think over what you said. 'Tain't right that young Ryder should be blamed for a crime he never committed. I'll sleep on it and let you know to-morrow."

Wishing to change the subject he tried to think of some other means of entertaining her.

"Would you like to hear some music, ma'am?" he said, putting his hand on the ancient phonograph with a battered horn. "I got some swell records."

Before he could get it going, they were interrupted by light feet running hastily up the steps and a figure in overalls and sweater dashed into the room. Gypsy bolted the door behind her.

"Quick! Quick!" she gasped. "Get

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



POETIC ARITHMETIC

WHEN I was young my soul was deemed prolific,
And I was wont to dream—yes, overmuch,
And tear off stanzas at a pace terrific
About my lady's hair and eyes and such.

Then I would read my verse with pride of youth,
To see just what my inspiration caught,
And maybe sum my efforts up, forsooth,
As sixteen perfect pearls of precious thought.

But time has taught a better song to sing,
So now, when I approximation make,
I think this stuff, though poor, at least should bring
A quart of onions, and perhaps a steak.

G. M. Randell.

me under cover. Dr. Ludlow and Riggs are coming across the lawn. They are on their way to the stables."

Then she caught sight of Mrs. Anstruther, gave one terrified gasp and darted into the bedroom.

Mrs. Anstruther arose in great agitation. "The doctor must not see me here," she cried. "I've not told you everything. It was worse than a quarrel. We had a terrible scrap. Doc would kill me if he found me here."

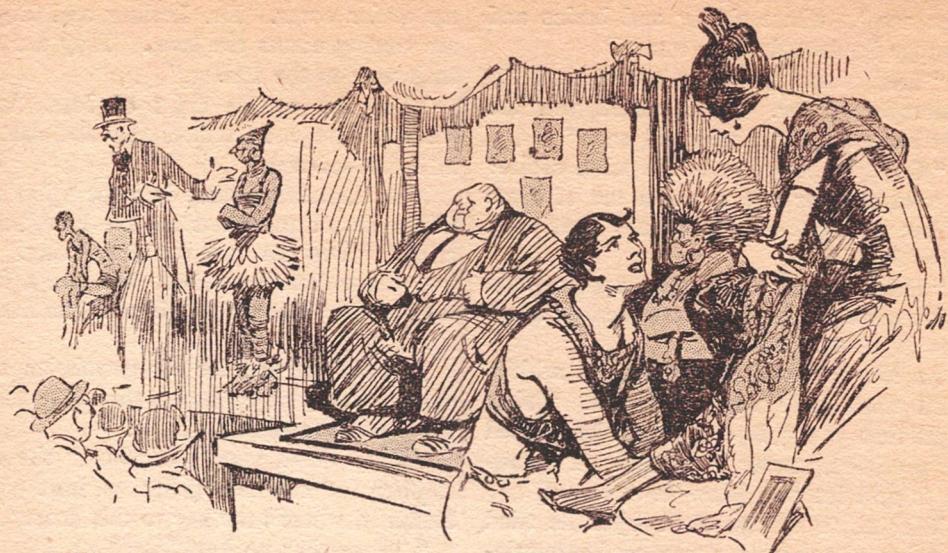
Without waiting for his permission she dashed into the bedroom, thrusting aside the fiercely resisting Gypsy.

"Keep quiet, you foolish boy," she exclaimed. "I'm not going to hurt you. Damn it, where's the key to this door!"

"There ain't no key!"

"Help me shove the washstand against it! Work fast. I hear doc's voice on the stairs."

As the two of them shoved the heavy, old-fashioned washstand before the door, Mrs. Anstruther turned and gave a little shriek of amazement and horror. For a moment she thought she was looking at a dead man in that bed in the corner. For on the pillow she saw the face of Kane Ryder.



Mingie Bird

By ALICE M. DODGE

COME in an' see the ug-li-iest wom-an in the wor-ld!" the Globe Museum spieler pleaded daily from one o'clock in the afternoon until eleven at night.

"Tin-pan! Tin-can! Tin-tin! Can-pan!" accompanied the wishy washy player piano.

Toody Pooch was conceded by press and public to be the world's homeliest woman. But in some ways this really was not such a drawback as one might suppose. It was her means of livelihood.

The Globe Traveling Museum Company paid her twenty dollars a week to display her lack of feminine charms. Yet there was some disadvantage to being the uncomeliest woman in the universe. For instance, where affairs of the heart were concerned it was a serious detriment.

And Toody did have an affair of the heart.

She was secretly in love with Pete Smull, who had charge of the trained fleas at the museum. But he was the last person in the

world she wanted to be aware of it. She guarded her secret as carefully as another would a vice. With an ugly face like hers there never could be an answer to her romance. That was the pathos of it.

Toody Pooch was one of nature's paradoxes. Although she had a wart on her chin, another on her forehead, a lumpy, wide-spreading nose, a large mouth with a thick, projecting lower lip, a cast in one eye, colorless, straggly hair, big ungainly hands and feet, a figure far removed from that of Venus of Milo, beauty, strange though it may seem, bloomed in her soul with all the bright glory of spring flowers.

Unconquerable nature, striving in some way to express that imprisoned beauty, endowed her with a voice full of rich, musical cadences. It was her one attractive feature. Because her face was so at variance with her voice the museum management would not permit her to speak to her audience.

When still very young Toody's inner self began to establish an inter-relation with the

world by serving others. In this manner she found a satisfying outlet for her love nature.

Not a day passed but what she performed some kind little service for her associates at the museum. It was quite extraordinary the things they could find for her to do for them.

Red Hart, the illiterate spieler, who had a touch of St. Vitus dance, asked her to write a weekly letter to his wife for him. Electra, the girl who unflinchingly took electric shocks of tremendous voltage, daily called upon Toody to powder her shapely, shock-proof back and arms. Shorty McGoon, the dwarf clown who strutted up and down in front of the museum, came to her with his many troubles.

Shorty had a vile, ungovernable temper. Bud Sparks, the manager, would have fired the dwarf on several occasions if Toody had not used her influence to patch up their differences.

On hot afternoons George Day, the fat man, often requested Toody to loosen the laces in his shoes because he could not stoop over his protuberant abdomen to do it himself. Then there was Rickie, the little pecan-headed, rabbit-toothed Aztec girl, to whom Toody brought candy and ice cream cones.

But she derived her greatest pleasure in sewing on Pete Smull's buttons and mending his clothes.

Pete was kind to Toody, but then he was kind to the Aztec and to Shorty. Toody had one consolation, however. Pete was not in love with any one else. Electra was securely married to Bud Sparks; the Aztec, besides being of mixed dark races, was less than a moron, and all the other members of the show were of the male gender.

As long as Pete remained unattached, Toody's unrequited love was not so hard to bear. After he had been with the company for over a year without even the semblance of a love affair she began to settle into a secure frame of mind. Besides, Pete had a habit of dropping into her booth to chat every day before opening time.

A hope began to grow in her lonely heart, probably a foolish hope, but one unbelievably alluring.

But this comfortable state of affairs couldn't last forever, and it didn't. The change came with the arrival of the Spanish dancer, Cara Cartero—christened Clara Carter and Ohio born—whom the management introduced to give a little more pep to the show.

Toody was talking to Pete when Cara arrived. The horney woman was quick to observe that Pete couldn't take his eyes off the dancer as Bud Sparks led her to the raised platform which had been newly erected across the rear end of the building near Toody's stall.

Cara's beauty was a matter of dark brown eyes, fringed with long, carefully beaded eyelashes, youthful rounded cheeks, artistically painted with a vivid orange-colored rouge, and full red lips, shapely, though a bit sullen. She was already attired for her dance. A flaming frock of red, trimmed with many hued flounces, adorned her slim, young body, graceful earrings dangled from her pink ears, a large spreading comb and a black lace mantilla enhanced the loveliness of her dark head.

Toody kept right on talking to Pete, but after a few minutes she saw that he wasn't listening to her. Then, without a backward glance, as though drawn by a magnet, he walked over to the dancer's platform.

Pete and Cara seemed to strike a responsive chord in each other at once. Pain pierced Toody's heart as she noted it. She had a poignant dread of what the future might bring forth.

In a few minutes the doors opened. A bored-looking, blond young man began to pedal the player piano with unimaginative feet. All the performers hurried to their respective stalls except Pete. Embarked upon a sea of forgetfulness, he was oblivious to everything except the light in Cara's eyes.

Red Hart, his nerve-afflicted head jerking with every word, started his spieling.

"Right this way! Tickets here! Only a dime, ten cents! Now! Now! Here! Here! Don't miss it. See the fat ma-an—the Az-tec girl—the marv-el-ous trained fleas—Cara, the cel-e-brat-ed Span-ish dancer—E-lec-tra, the hu-man dy-na-mo—and, la-ast, but not le-ast, the ug-li-est woman in the wor-l'd!"

As Red finished his announcement Cara directed a swift, appraising glance at Toody. Then, turning to Pete, the dancer smiled self-satisfiedly and said in a high-pitched voice: "Holy cow, the poor prune has a face that not even Gawd or a mother could love."

Instantly tears stung Toody's eyeballs. Long before she had grown indifferent to similar remarks from her audience, but now she was cruelly hurt. Pete had laughed at Cara's words as he had reluctantly torn himself from her side to go to his fleas.

Shiny Jones, envied possessor of six gold teeth, which accentuated his unhealthy pallor, and who consequently bore the title of museum lecturer, began to lead the rapidly growing audience from attraction to attraction. With indelicate humor, he explained the qualifications of each one for a right to a place in "the world's greatest museum."

The patrons were mainly Orientals, Greeks, Mexicans and negroes. The company was showing in Sacramento, California's capital city, in a ramshackle river-front building, a relic of the old gold-rush days. Misery, toil, gayety, happiness, failure, success had each during its reign left some imprint on the old battered, grimy walls.

Each freak or attraction was closed in by a bunting-decorated railing. Electra, the Aztec, and Pete's fleas were at the front of the building, while the fat man, Toody, and Cara were installed at the rear.

Close at the lecturer's heels the mixed audience moved from booth to booth. With a tug of pain at her heart Toody watched the crowd leave the fleas to come to the fat man's place. After he had been viewed and lectured upon, she would be the next on the program. She now dreaded being exploited as the queen of ugliness as she never had before.

"And this is the fattest man in the world," droned Shiny. "He weighs seven hundred and forty-five pounds, is five feet eleven inches tall, one hundred and one inches around the waist, single and looking for a wife. Nice fat chance for somebody."

He paused to absorb the laugh which he

always expected his mental brilliance to call forth at this juncture.

He kept the spectators at George's stall for a few minutes longer, urging them to buy pictures of the fat man "for only a dime, ten cents!" Then, with an exaggerated sense of his own importance, he led the patrons to Toody's platform.

"And here, friends," he began, showing his gold teeth in a broad smile, "is Miss Toody Pooch, the woman who won the prize for being the world's homeliest woman. We have a standing offer of five thousand dollars to any woman uglier."

The amused crowd serried close against the railing, some of them standing on tiptoe for a better view of the world's homeliest. Cara flashed a contemptuous glance in Toody's direction; then with a look which fairly dripped knowledge of her own charms, the dancer's eyes sought Pete's, deliberately beguiling. Toody's hands gripped the arms of her chair as he smiled back at the siren.

"Miss Pooch is twenty-five years old, single, and looking for a husband," the lecturer went on.

The crowd laughed uproariously.

Toody managed to smile, as she was supposed to do at this point. Obliquely, she observed Cara raise one carefully arched eyebrow in Pete's direction and saw him beam back at the dancer.

"Once," continued Shiny, "she answered a matrimonial ad and corresponded with a man for six months. Finally he asked for her picture. She sent it to him." He paused significantly. "When the poor man got it he dropped dead."

An unrestrained wave of laughter reverberated through the building.

"Miss Pooch says she wants to marry a Sacramento man," announced Shiny.

More mirth greeted this remark.

"Which one do you want, Miss Pooch?" Shiny asked with mock politeness.

This had been part of the program ever since Toody had been on the road with the company. Her nerves trembling and a mist in front of her eyes, she waved a wobbly finger at a gaping Hindu. Loud guffaws rang and rerang through the place. Toody was the most mirth-provoking freak the museum possessed.

Before passing on Shiny exhorted the patrons to buy Toody's picture "to keep the rats away."

"Now we'll go from the ridiculous to the sublime," he sang, moving toward Cara's platform. "You have seen the world's homeliest lady, now you may gaze upon one of the fairest."

Rose colored footlights, which intensified Cara's dark beauty, were turned on. The girl's eyes glowed. She flashed devastating smiles around the gullible crowd. Every patron of the place was crowding close, straining to get a look at her. Pete was standing on a chair in his booth.

"Señorita Cartero will now dance for us," stated Shiny, giving a sign to the weary-eyed piano pedalist.

With movements of exquisite grace, Cara postured and danced to the strains of "Españo." Keeping perfect time with her castanets, she stamped her small foot and tossed her shapely head defiantly. Occasionally she darted a provocative look at Pete.

An agony of dread clutched Toody's heart. Until the arrival of Cara the uncomely woman had never so bitterly realized the depth and the futility of her own love for Pete Smull. Placed for unkindly comparison next to Cara, the museum had become unbearable to Toody. Her situation was too pungent, too cruel.

In the succeeding days Pete spent every minute that he could get away from his fleas at Cara's side. He ceased his visits to Toody, not even bringing his mending to her.

It required all of Toody's self-control to appear unmoved as he wooed the dancer with his kindly, melancholy eyes and caressed her with his drawling voice. Worse than that, the tortured woman could hear nearly every word that passed from Cara's adjoining platform, words for which Toody would have sold her soul for the privilege of hearing them addressed to her own unprepossessing self by Pete. In the first few days he called Cara kid, later babe and then mingie bird, the last a term of endearment he had coined himself.

One day, three weeks later, after the show had moved to Stockton, Pete stopped

at Toody's stall for a few minutes to leave some mending. Her heart bounded half-anticipatory, half-apprehensive.

"Got to get ready for next week," he said, his face alight.

The hope fled from Toody's heart as quickly as it had come.

"Cara and I are going to step to the altar next Wednesday," he went on, blissfully unconscious of the havoc he was wreaking in Toody's heart. He grew expansive, dwelling long and lovingly on his fiancée's many charms.

As he talked Toody's pulse seemed to stop. She sank back in her chair, her ashen face staring at him immovable as a Buddha.

Married! Pete married to Cara! True, that possibility had presented itself to her, but now that it had actually arrived she was hardly prepared for the wave of blank desolation it sent over her.

Rallying by an effort, she moved at last and contrived to speak.

"I wish you luck, Pete."

He was too gloriously absorbed to notice anything amiss in Toody's manner, for Cara, dressed to the utmost of her brunette effectiveness, was coming in at the front door. He rose hastily and moved to meet the beautiful dancer.

"Say, Peter," Cara reproved in a shrill voice, obviously intended for Toody's ears, "I'm liable to get jealous if you hang around Flat Tire."

Laughing indulgently, Pete tucked the girl's arm under his and started toward her platform.

"I know you're only kiddin' about Toody, Babe. You wait till we're married an' I'll never even look at another dame."

Toody wondered how her heart could stand so much and not break. Married! All through the rest of that afternoon and evening the word pecked at her brain like a red-hot needle. The mechanical music from the piano seemed to beat it relentlessly upon her eardrums.

By the first of the following week a grayness as of a bleak dawn had settled upon Toody Pooch. Shiny Jones complained that on two occasions she had forgotten to point her finger at a man in the crowd in response to his cue.

Cara invited the entire company to attend her wedding. Each performer, except Toody, was in a flurry of preparation for it. The homely woman declined Cara's invitation with a vague excuse. She simply could not bring herself to the point of seeing Pete married.

"What's the matter? Sore because you can't land a man?" Cara asked with her characteristic cruelty, her eyes mocking.

"No," Toody answered. She was not able to say more at the moment with her temples drumming so madly.

Before she started for her stage, Cara darted a swift, searching glance at Toody, which made the distressed woman color in spite of herself.

Supperless, her thoughts flowing through dark, dismal channels, Toody passed the long, sleepless night before Pete's wedding day. When the morning dawned at last, she arose, pale and hollow-eyed, her ugliness heightened by her suffering. A sickening ache was tearing at her vitals.

By eleven o'clock, the hour set for the ceremony, her love and longing for Pete grew so intolerable that Toody could not remain indoors. She walked the streets until nearly noon, then, having nothing better to do, went to the museum.

The janitor of the building unlocked the doors for her. Slowly and heavily, she dragged herself through the funereal stillness of the empty place to her stall. She dropped wearily into her chair and sat with her chin in her hand, staring at the bare walls. Wordlessly, she began to pray that her eyes and voice would not betray her misery when the wedding party arrived.

"A telegram for Miss Cara Cartero!" a piping voice broke in upon her reflections.

Toody signed for the message. Congratulations, she thought bitterly as she leaned the envelope against a chair on the dancer's platform.

Shortly, the grinding of brakes shrieked at the curb outside. Toody knew the sound. It was Bud Sparks's long-used, long-abused car. She forced a smile to her drooping lips. She must keep calm. She must congratulate the bride and groom. Her face grew tortured for a moment at the mere thought.

Bud and Cara entered the building first. The others trailed behind, but Pete was not with them. Toody's smile faded. She sensed a strange graveness in the air as the party made their way to her.

Pete! Something had happened to him! Toody's heart skipped several beats. She stumbled to her feet, one unshapely hand clutching, tearing at the other.

"What's the matter? Where—" she began in a quavering voice.

"Oh!" Cara had seen the telegram. She pounced upon it and tore it open with eager fingers.

"Pete got run over by a train," said Bud Sparks, shaking his iron-gray head solemnly.

"Dead?" Toody never knew how she got the question past the lump in her throat.

"Say, whadda you know?" screeched Cara before any one could answer. "Charlie Hayes wants me to go on the big time with him! Gee, I'm glad I ain't got no contract with this freak bunch."

It was then that Toody let go of her last remnant of self-control to which she had been clinging as a drowning person would a bit of wreckage. She turned to Cara fiercely.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. When your husband's dead, too."

"Apple sauce!" sneered Cara. "He ain't dead. Might as well be, though, with both legs cut off. Thank Gawd we didn't get as far as the husband stage because a red-hot mamma like me can't be tied down with no excess baggage."

"You ought to be proud to have Pete Smull for a husband," Toody cried, her rich voice vibrant with betraying emotion.

"You can have what's left of him, Flat Tire," Cara flung over her shoulder at the sobbing woman. "Good-by, everybody," she called stridently to the others and was gone.

A week later when Toody was permitted to see Pete for the first time after the accident, her whole starved being went out to his maimed form lying helpless on the narrow hospital cot.

"Oh, Pete," was all she could articulate, and that brokenly.

"I'm a flop, Toody. There ain't much left of me," he said with a wry smile.

She searched her mind for something encouraging to say.

"I'm sorry Cara gave you the air, Pete," were the only words that came. She could have bitten her tongue out after saying them.

"That's all cold," he answered indifferently. "I know now we'd never made a go of it. Bud get any one in my place?"

"Well—er—you know, Pete, he had to get some one to take care of the fleas," she stammered, looking down on him with tender solicitude.

Pete lowered his lids over his troubled gray eyes.

"Yeh, I suppose he did. Ain't much a guy like me can do, is they? Might as well have kicked off and be done with it."

"Oh, Pete, honey, don't talk like that," she sobbed, falling upon her knees beside his bed. "As long as I got a dollar you needn't worry!"

"What! Live off a woman! I should say not!"

"But, Pete, you're gonna need some one to take care of you now. Some one"—her voice dropped to a soft undertone, and she buried her burning face in the bed covers—"some one that loves you."

He made no answer, but he stroked her head, a hint of tenderness in his touch.

"I've been thinkin' an' thinkin' for you, Pete." How her rich voice yearned over him. "I was thinkin' maybe you could get a couple of them marionette dolls on strings an' work 'em behind a curtain with your hands. With a peppy line of patter, you could have a good act, Pete."

His face lighted as though at the recovery of something lost.

"By golly, I could, couldn't I?"

"An' I'll wheel you back an' forth every day, Pete."

"Gosh, Toody, you ain't there with the looks, but you sure got something inside of you in your heart," he exclaimed fervently, "and your voice—well, it always did kind of get me, babe."

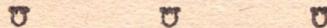
"Pete, you called me babe!"

"Say, mingie bird, if you want half a man, let me'n you get married," he offered whimsically.

"Mingie bird! Oh, Pete, honey, I never dreamed you'd call *me* that," she breathed, her voice almost as reverent as prayer.

They clung to each other silently. Love, that mysterious magic, which sometimes searches out the arid spots and the waste places of life, had spread its sweet mantle of compassion over the two victims of an unkind destiny and transformed the world for them.

THE END



DOMESTIC

I WISH I had a brawny arm and wore a mighty shoe;
I wish that I was hefty built, indeed, indeed I do!
But I am' neither big nor strong, and naught my grief assuages!
Because I want and cannot have our kitchen Mary's wages.

She gets the money for my hats and for my buckled shoeses,
And she buys sixes, several pair, with what I'd pay for twoses.
She has the cash that might have made her mistress most bewitchin',
For I must wear ol' clo'ees to keep our Mary in the kitchen.

And so I wail because I'm not of Amazonian build,
For if I had to scrub a floor I guess I should be killed.
And yet the question troubles me, which really would be better:
To own that longed-for frock and scrub, or be *dear* Mary's debtor?

Grace Stone Field.



Tom, Dick and Harry

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Unbeatable Bates," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

TELLTALE TYPE.

THE report of the detective from the private agency that the copy of Norcott, Cadman & Brockley's estimate on the City Hospital contract had been furnished to the rival firm of Rufus F. Saxton & Son by Tom Brockley himself, assisted by the young bookkeeper, Myrtle Lander, utterly staggered Harry Norcott for an instant, but his feeling of horror gave way at once to incredulity and something like amusement.

"You'll have to try again, Mr. Evarts," he said a trifle contemptuously, "and I hope you won't come to me with a report that I did the job myself. It seems to me that you've seen enough of us yourself to know that Mr. Brockley couldn't possibly have done such a thing; and Miss Lander is absolutely above suspicion. You startled

me for a moment, but your report is almost funny; it's too absurd to be taken seriously."

"They often seem that way, Mr. Norcott," said the detective patiently; "but we run into some surprising situations. No man is guilty until he's proved to be by the law; but to the detective no person is innocent until the guilty ones have been found. You know that it sometimes happens that we land the very man that has employed us on the case; but I must say that I wasn't expecting to get you linked up with this affair, and I certainly didn't think I'd get anything on Mr. Brockley—though you can't tell what will develop when a man's mixed up with people like Martin Telfer and Mayor Durfey. I'm sorry about this Miss Lander, but she needed money, I suppose, and she's the quiet sort; you never can tell much about 'em."

"You'll have to show me, Mr. Evarts,"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 19.

said Harry. "Of course there's no use in discussing the thing until you've given me your full report."

Mrs. Norcott and Octavia Wadman were still in the office, talking of the former's amazing decision to run for the office of mayor, and Harry and the detective left the store quietly and walked down the street.

"I can tell you all about it in a few words, Mr. Norcott," said Evarts. "You know, of course, that this is a private investigation, and I haven't gone into it as a criminal case; I haven't accused anybody of anything, and I haven't squeezed out any confessions or any such thing as that. All I've got so far is more or less circumstantial, but I think you'll find that I'm not barking up the wrong tree."

"Between you and me," he continued, "that swell crook, Martin Telfer, is one of the fellers at the bottom of the thing. Mr. Brockley is all puffed up about being engaged to the Telfer girl, and he's pretty much in love, too, I guess; he'd run and do anything that Martin Telfer wanted him to do."

"I can't believe that he'd do that," persisted Harry. "He's never had any love for the Saxtons since he worked for them, and I don't think he could bring himself to sell his own firm's secrets to them; it would be too humiliating."

"Oh, I don't think Mr. Brockley appeared personally in the case," said Evarts. "I figure that he got the Lander girl to do all the dirty work for him. The Saxtons only paid a hundred dollars for the dope, and the girl probably got that. I guess Martin Telfer gave poor Brockley his orders, and they had to be obeyed; the money in the case went to the girl to pay for her trouble and work."

"It gets more and more absurd and impossible," Harry remarked.

"I've seen the copy of the estimate," declared the detective, "and I can tell you that it was written on Brockley's own portable typewriter—that he keeps locked up in the lower drawer of his desk—and the paper was the light blue bond paper that he uses for his own correspondence.

"The sheets had the tops torn off, where

his name is printed. I examined the writing with a glass, and it shows up the type of Brockley's machine; you can tell easy enough, you know, by flaws and damaged type."

"Then I traced the typing to Miss Lander," he continued, with some professional satisfaction. "I've examined the typewriting of every person in your office, Mr. Norcott—even your own. Miss Lander doesn't do much typing, and she has trouble with her 'b's' and 'v's'; she hits the wrong letter and then erases it. Then she hits her capital letters hard every time, and hammers the first couple of words of a new paragraph."

"It's all circumstantial, as you say," Harry observed lightly; "and it seems to me a little too much so."

"Hold hard!" cautioned the detective; "I'm not through yet. I made use of your young clerk, Eddie Roker. He made me acquainted with his best girl, that's a stenographer for the Saxtons, and she gave me most of the stuff."

"She took a chance for Eddie's sake, and showed me the copy of the estimate. I found out that young Hobart Saxton, the junior partner, called at Miss Lander's home a couple of times at least, and Roker's girl says that he wrote her a letter on the typewriter himself, just after the copy was delivered. The girl saw the envelope addressed to Miss Lander when young Saxton put it in the outgoing mail basket."

Harry scowled impatiently and was still unwilling to be convinced.

"Your suspicions of Brockley seem to be mere guesswork," he remarked.

"Pretty good guessing, I think," said Evarts. "I've watched your office a good deal, and Brockley and Miss Lander are not at all thick; he hasn't eyes for anybody but the Telfer girl. It was simply a business proposition between them. Brockley isn't very clever, you know, and he wasn't cautious; he probably handed Miss Lander the blue paper, and he *did* think that he was clever when he got her to use his portable typewriter; he didn't want to take a chance on the office machine."

"His machine is locked up most of the time in his desk, and I guess you never

knew Miss Lander to go and get it, did you? I figure that he may have let her take it home with her at night, and he probably borrowed your estimate out of the safe after it was shut up for the night, and put it back early in the morning."

Harry was agitated and indignant. He regretted that he had called in the detective, for such men had a way of getting results by hook or crook, and would implicate an innocent person without doubt if they could not achieve success in any other way.

He did not return to the office that day, but telephoned to Dick and mystified the latter greatly by insisting on arranging an interview with Miss Hanby for that evening. He told Dick that the detective had rendered a report, and that he wanted to consult Miss Hanby about it, on account of the information that she had previously supplied.

The evening conference took place at Dick's house, with his father and mother tactfully excluded, and Harry allowed the detective to repeat his report to Dick and Miss Hanby.

"You see, it's all very confidential and very painful, Miss Hanby," Harry said coldly. "I don't credit it yet, but I thought you might give us information that would have a bearing upon it."

"I'll do anything I can to help," said the girl, "but now I'm almost sorry that I told you what I did about Myrtle Lander. It's too shocking to know that she really did do such a thing as that."

"What *she* did doesn't interest me particularly," put in Dick Cadman. "It's the matter of Tom Brockley's being involved that gets me."

"It will do no good to discuss it, unless we can prove something one way or the other," said Harry. "You were rarely out of the office, Miss Hanby, and I want to know if you ever knew anything about this portable typewriter of Mr. Brockley's. Mr. Evarts has been a regular *Sherlock Holmes*, and he has managed to examine the machine with a magnifying glass, and all that sort of thing. There's no doubt, of course, that the machine was used, for every typewriter shows its peculiarities; but I'm not yet convinced that Miss Lander used it, nor

that it was used with the knowledge and permission of Mr. Brockley.

"I'm prepared to suspect almost any one now, and it might be possible that Eddie Roker and his girl were in the conspiracy."

"I know more about it, I fear, than I really wish I did," said Miss Hanby tragically. "This is terrible—shocking! Myrtle Lander took typewriting in the commercial school, along with her bookkeeping course," she explained, "but she's never been employed as a stenographer; and any one gets rusty pretty soon if they don't have any practice."

"She has written a little on the office machine, once in awhile, and a few weeks ago she mentioned to me that she ought to get a machine and practice. Well, I certainly never thought anything about it at the time, but Mr. Brockley happened to be writing on his portable one day, and he said that he might just as well not have it, for all the use that he made of it. Miss Lander heard him, and she spoke up right away and said that she might buy it, or rent it from him, if he didn't need it. She said that she wanted to be able to use a typewriter properly in case she had to."

"Mr. Brockley is very hearty and generous, you know, and he said right off that she didn't have to buy it or hire it; she could take the machine home with her that night and use it as long as she liked. He put it in the carrying case for her, when he got through writing, and she took it home with her that night."

"It all comes back to me now," she went on regretfully. "He took a lot of that blue paper of his and put it into the typewriter case, and he told her she could use that to practice on. She kept the machine about three weeks, I should say, and now I remember that she brought it back just about the time that we had finished the estimate."

"And I remember now that I thought it was queer that I didn't hear her say much to Mr. Brockley about the machine. She just brought it back and placed it in his desk, and she never said a word to me about practicing on it or anything, though we were always talking together about such things."

"I guess there's not much doubt that Mr. Evarts has got the right answer to the thing," said Dick mournfully. "Everything matches up only too well. By Jove—you can't trust anybody nowadays!"

Harry regarded him a bit quizzically, but was not in a mood to smile.

"If it will be of any use to Mr. Evarts," said Miss Hanby in her earnest spirit of co-operation, "I have a specimen of Miss Lander's typing here with me."

She took a more or less crumpled slip of paper from her purse and handed it to the detective.

He looked at it, but shook his head and passed it back.

"Thanks," he said politely, "but I don't need it. I managed to get a bit of Miss Lander's work in the office, and I matched up some of her peculiarities with those that showed up in the copy of the estimate."

"May I ask how you happened to preserve that slip of paper, Miss Hanby?" said Harry curiously.

"To study it," the girl answered simply. "I'm interested in everything that has to do with the work that I'm engaged in. At the commercial school where I got my training a man came and gave us a lecture on peculiarities in typewriting. He said that you could identify people by their typewriting just as well as you could by their handwriting; and he showed us how no two people ever wrote in the same way on a machine.

"It was very interesting and I've often studied it since then. I'm always getting bits of writing from my friends just to study them and see how many peculiarities they show."

"It is very interesting, I'm sure," said Harry. "If you don't mind, I'd like to take that slip of paper and examine the writing myself. I want to follow out the theories of Mr. Evarts on this case, if I can."

She gave him the specimen and he tucked it away in his pocket.

"What's to be done now?" inquired Dick Cadman dejectedly.

"Nothing, at present," said Harry. "I'm sure that Mr. Evarts has given us his best service, and he's built up what would be an interesting case, were it not so horrible.

"For the present, I think we'd better keep it all a strict secret. Miss Hanby is no longer in the office, so she won't find her knowledge of the case embarrassing, and I hope you can manage to talk with Tom, Dick, without showing that anything unusual has happened."

"I don't know," said Dick grumpily. "It is hard to stand for treachery like that from a man that you've trusted practically all your life."

"Yes, it is," agreed Harry, looking at him intently.

Dick's eyes wavered and he flushed in sudden confusion.

"We must make no further mistakes if we can help it," said Harry. "I don't care to accuse Tom or Miss Lander of such a dastardly act until I'm sure of my ground. There are no more contracts for us to worry about at present, and if we can endure the suspense for a little while I shall make such further inquiries as may satisfy me that Mr. Evarts is right."

"I must say I think Dick is right," said Miss Hanby, enjoying the prerogative of a bride-elect. "I don't see how he can stand it to be right there in that office with people that have betrayed confidence and trust like that."

"Justice will be done, I'm sure," Harry assured her gravely; "but too much haste is likely to bring regret. Thank you very much for your help this evening, Miss Hanby, and I'll be even more grateful if you'll help us to keep the matter a close secret until there are further developments."

Harry and the detective left the Cadman house and walked slowly down town.

"I guess I've done about all I can for you now, Mr. Norcott," said Evarts. "I'm a fairly good judge of folks and cases, and I'd make a small bet with any one that I'm not far wrong in this affair. All I got out of this Miss Hanby to-night was that the Lander girl might have done the whole job."

"It's just possible that Mr. Brockley is the victim of the circumstances. If he really lent her his typewriter and gave her some paper to use, it may be that he didn't have anything to do with the game. The ques-

tion would be, then, how did she get the estimate and take it home with her to copy it?"

"That's the difficulty," agreed Harry. "I don't see how Miss Lander could get the papers out of the safe without help from some other person in the office, and I'm sure she never could have had a chance to replace them there in the morning if she got them.

"But I'm not through with you yet, anyway, Mr. Evarts, if you can give me a little more of your time," he went on. "I'd like to employ you now to do a little dirty work for me, as it were.

"I want that copy of our estimate that's in the files of Saxton & Son, if you can manage to get it for me.

"If they stole it from us, we surely have a moral right to steal it back again. I want that same blue-paper copy that you say you have had in your hands, and it's up to you to get it for me. I don't care whether you use Eddie Roker and his sweetheart again, or how you go about it. It's an unwholesome mess that we've got into anyway, and I'm going to clear up the thing if there's any way to do it."

"You're the boss, Mr. Norcott," said the detective, shrugging his shoulders, "and you're paying the bills, I believe."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN OF THE HOUR.

SUSPICIOUSLY soon after the sensational visit of Mrs. Jane Norcott and Miss Octavia Wadman to the mayor's office a burst of feverish activity upset the peace and quiet of the City Hall, and presently extended itself to the lonesome grass plots on Harrow Avenue which had become humorously familiar to the citizens as "the City Hospital site." A gang of laborers appeared and began to scrape away the green grass and dig into the solid earth, and carpenters erected stakes and rails which presently outlined very impressively the large area that was to be covered by a great structure of brick and granite.

The mayor's friends confided awesomely to the citizens that Roscoe Durfey was at

last on his high horse, ready to battle for the rights of the people, and that he had read the riot act to various procrastinating architects, contractors, commissioners, and their minions, in his own inimitable manner.

A definite date was again established for the laying of the cornerstone, and the mayor was quoted as saying that he would lay the stone on that very date if he had to go out and quarry it, dress it, engrave it, and haul it to the place of the ceremonial himself.

Favorably inclined newspapers commented editorially upon the mayor's gallantry and courage in calling the laggards to account, and invited the public to visit Harrow Avenue and see with its own eyes the scurrying laborers and artisans, all eagerly striving to earn the approval of the alert and uncompromising Roscoe Durfey, champion of the common people and the tax-payers.

It could not be denied that the work, so long in starting, was showing noteworthy progress day by day. Within the lines marked out by the bright new rails, walls and buttresses took shape in stone and cement, and inside the walls grew up a forest of concrete piers that looked like well-ordered and robust stalagmites on the floor of a cavern.

Interested and curious citizens, willing to see and believe, visited the construction work, to the despair of the inadequately protected workers, and the scene took on the air of classic ruins with tourists rambling about among catacombs and monuments.

Mrs. Norcott and Octavia Wadman visited the scene, and they smiled as they agreed that their visit to the City Hall had not been in vain.

"I should be glad, however, to have a disinterested engineer give me an opinion upon the work that's being done," said Mrs. Norcott sagely. "Busy they certainly are, but I'm not prepared to speak intelligently of the quality of the craftsmanship."

"I am!" exclaimed a cross, crabbed, elderly man near them, whom they recognized as Hiram King, Harrowburg's oldest dealer in hardware and building supplies,

and one of the disappointed competitors in the contest for the supply contract.

"I am!" he repeated savagely, "and I could say a lot if I wanted to, Mrs. Norcott. And I'll have something to say, too, before I'm through."

"You evidently don't approve of the work that's being done, Mr. King," murmured Miss Wadman encouragingly. "Or is it the material that is being used?"

"It's gol-darn near everything!" he growled, advancing and prodding a concrete pier with his walking stick. "Look a' that! Why didn't they make that foundation out o' Injun-meal mush? It would be just as good. They're goin' to rest a six-story brick and stone building on them piers, if you want to know! That's rotten concrete—plumb rotten! The cement's bad, the sand is bad, and it ain't mixed right! Look a' here; I can crumble the edges o' that pier with the toe o' my boot."

A portly, important-looking man had just alighted from an automobile, and he came over toward Hiram King and the two women.

"I'll have to ask you to get outside the excavation, please," he said with grave courtesy. "I find that the public are interfering with the workmen. I shall have to build a temporary fence."

"To keep 'em from bothering, or to keep 'em from seeing too much, Mr. Porter?" inquired Hiram King pointedly.

"I don't care to discuss construction methods with you, Mr. King," replied the superintendent. "Voluntary critics are not wanted here."

"Mr. Porter," said Jane Norcott, with her most majestic air, "I believe you are the local representative of the firm of Usher and Vidal, are you not? I am Mrs. Norcott, president of the Women's Civic League, and I am interested as a citizen in these operations. I will go outside this excavation in a moment, as you request, but I think it is unfortunate for our city, if citizens are not allowed to see what is being done with their money."

"If a qualified engineer came here and asked me questions, I would undertake to answer them to his satisfaction," said

Porter curtly. "I never heard of a contractor who invited the public in to offer criticisms, and I certainly would not stand for such an annoyance."

Dr. Alvin Brockley, father of Tom, overheard the passage at arms, and drew near the group.

"I beg pardon," he said in his mild, apologetic manner, "but I guess any citizen that looked over this work would be a little curious, Mr. Porter. I was just down there by the front wall, where they are putting in water pipes and drains, and I must say I'm astonished. Iron pipe, Mr. Porter! Iron pipe for the water supply in a hospital that we have been assured would be the most modern and up-to-date structure of its kind in the State. I believe brass is used wherever anything like permanence and reliable service is desired. It doesn't seem possible that the architects' specifications could have called for iron pipe."

"They didn't!" snapped Hiram King. "I saw 'em, and I know."

"I don't care to discuss such questions with you," said Porter nervously. "I'm employed by the city. You'd better take your criticisms to the mayor."

"I would, if I thought it were not already too late," said Dr. Brockley. "I must say, this is a great disappointment to me. I asked one of your foremen down there where the ash and refuse hoists were to be located in the cellar, and he said the plans didn't call for them. But I distinctly remember that the newspaper descriptions of the building mentioned such things."

"Sure they did!" seconded Hiram King. "But that's nothing! I been looking around for the pits of the ventilating shafts, like the plans called for, and a foreman told me just now that them shafts didn't need to come down to the cellar."

"I don't care to discuss these things, I tell you," said Porter. "You must understand that there have been delays, and now we are rushing the job and trying to show results. You can't judge the building by a mere excavation. All of the things you mention will be taken care of, I assure you."

"Ah, I see," said Mrs. Norcott, ap-

parently enlightened. "The plan is quite in keeping with various other works of the present administration. The building will be erected and offered to the people for their approval, and then the city will be allowed to make additional appropriations for the improvements needed to make it a practical, working hospital.

"It will be a small matter, of course, to change the water system, and probably the heating plant, as well. Then the foundations may be reconstructed, to permit the installation of a proper ventilating system. I should call this quite typical of the average political enterprise."

"Please step outside," said Porter sternly.

"With pleasure," returned the lady; "I have seen quite enough, I assure you."

"I could show you a lot more!" declared Hiram King. "I had a pretty good look around, and it's the biggest fake I ever saw in all the forty years that I've been in the business."

"Outside!" cried Porter angrily.

"Won't you accompany us, Mr. King; you and Dr. Brockley also?" asked Mrs. Norcott. "If we can't discuss this outrage here, I'm sure we may do so where Mr. Porter has no jurisdiction, though it is rather odd that citizens have no rights upon their own property."

About the time of this skirmish at the hospital excavation, Martin Telfer dropped in at the Norcott, Cadman & Brockley store for one of his friendly visits, and Tom Brockley was evidently expecting him, for he had remained in the office since noon, contrary to his usual procedure.

"How's it going, boys?" asked Telfer genially, shaking hands all round and smiling ingratiatingly at the two young women.

Dick Cadman eyed him askance, and Tom quickly noted the coldness and wondered at it, but Harry Norcott was perfunctorily courteous, and asked Telfer to sit down.

"I'll do it, Harry; just for a minute," said the caller, and beamed upon the young man. "By the way," he said, drawing his chair nearer Harry's desk, "I've been thinking of dropping in at your house one of these days, when you and your mother are go-

ing to be at home. I'd like to have a little friendly talk with your mother, Harry. Haven't seen her since she and Miss Wadman were talking things over with me and the mayor, and I might clear up one or two points that she was worried about that day."

"I will speak to my mother about it," said Harry.

"You tell her that Mr. Durfey was kind of nervous that day, but he's willing and anxious to do anything he can to please her and the ladies of the Women's Civic League. I have his word for it, that he's going to do all he can to conform to the demands of the intelligent women voters of the city. The ladies didn't like the delay on the hospital construction, but now the hospital is started, isn't it? That speaks for itself."

"I'll say it does!" exclaimed the anxious Tom. "I was over there this morning and it's a wonder—the way they're hustling that thing along. You can see it grow."

"Yes, yes," chuckled Telfer, "you have to hand it to Durfey! When he makes up his mind to do a thing, everything has to jump."

"I hope they'll remember that they're building a hospital," said Dick sourly. "I hope the thing will stand up for awhile after they've got it thrown together."

"Don't you worry, young man!" exclaimed Telfer reprovingly. "You're too pessimistic, my friend. Mayor Durfey has some pride in his city, and Usher and Vidal don't put up buildings that will injure their reputation."

Dick's father, Samuel Cadman, came into the office suddenly, excited and out of breath.

"Here you are, Mr. Telfer!" he gasped, gazing at the other visitor with a look of vast relief. "They don't often use me for a messenger boy over at the City Hall, but the mayor has had a lot of us out looking all over the town for you. I just heard you were seen coming in here awhile ago, and I'm mighty glad I found you."

"What's wrong with the mayor?" inquired Telfer anxiously, starting to his feet.

"He's a mighty mad man," answered Mr. Cadman, not without something of the

relish of the bearer of important tidings. "That Jane Norcott—I beg your pardon, Harry, I mean your mother—that Mrs. Norcott has been to the court house with a sort of a committee of citizens, and she's gone an' got Judge Quackenbush to issue an injunction stopping the construction of the hospital."

Martin Telfer let out a startling, savage cry, and then he swore vociferously with eloquence and variety. Mrs. Gentry, the new stenographer, looked horrified and stopped her ears with her conspicuously pretty hands. Miss Lander smiled very slightly and went on with her work.

"An injunction!" gasped Telfer presently, and paused for breath. "What's the idea? An injunction! Tell us, what is it all about?"

"Mrs. Norcott claims that the hospital is an example of political fraud and graft," said Mr. Cadman, delighted to furnish information. "She has got an injunction, as president of the Women's Civic League, to stop further construction till a special commission can start an investigation. It's all coming out in the evening papers, and Mrs. Norcott has announced to the papers that she'll be a candidate for mayor, to clean up the city."

"Of all the fool women!" panted Telfer, weak from exhaustion.

"I'll make allowances for temper, Mr. Telfer," said Harry, "but be careful of your words!"

"I don't care what you make allowances for!" retorted the angry man. "It takes a woman to start trouble every time!"

"There were men in the party at the courthouse," said Mr. Cadman, ready with further information. "Hiram King gave evidence, and Dr. Brockley—Tom's father—was there to make a complaint."

"The poor old fool!" cried Tom, beside himself with rage.

"It runs in the family!" exclaimed Dick Cadman, with an ugly leer.

"Dr. Brockley is a doddering, meddlesome old chatterbox!" fumed Martin Telfer, "and I'll tell him so myself. The mayor was going to do something for him! You're right, Cadman, it runs in the family! I won't have a daughter o' mine marrying

into such a family! Why, didn't you know what that old imbecile was about, Tom? You never know anything! You're a big noise, and there's nothing else to you! No brains! Nothing to you but a loud mouth and a lot o' bluff! Keep out o' my house after this! Do you hear? I won't have you round! Keep away from my girl, or I'll set the dog on you!"

"Look here!" gasped Tom. "Say! Look here! You can't—I won't take that from any man!"

"Blah! Blah!" yelled Telfer, with returning strength and fury, and suddenly dashed out of the office, casting insults and vituperation behind him, while Samuel Cadman ambled in his wake, looking rather pleased with himself and his part in the stirring episode.

"I won't stand it!" declared Tom spiritedly.

"All right, don't!" said Dick contemptuously, venting some of the feeling that had seethed within him since the revelations of the detective.

"What's got into you?" snarled Tom, but looked at him uneasily.

"Telfer was right," said Dick: "you're a big noise, with nothing behind it but hot air. You didn't have nerve enough to stand up for your own father, with Telfer here. You thought you'd keep in right with Telfer by slamming your father, and it didn't get you anything, did it?"

"Listen!" cried Harry. "They're shouting 'Extra' on the street. Let's get one and read about my mother. *She's the man of the hour!*"

CHAPTER XIX.

"TO HORSE, AND AWAY!"

On the day following that of the sensation created by Mrs. Jane Norcott, the Women's Civic League held a mass meeting and enthusiastically confirmed the nomination of the lady for Mayor of Harrowburg. Roscoe Durfey was denounced as a grafted, swindler, boot-legger, and everything else that could make a city government notorious for corruption, and many reputable citizens of the opposite

sex came out for Mrs. Norcott, declaring that the time for house-cleaning had come.

It was a great day for women, and in the excitement and zeal of the unusual occasion Octavia Wadman was hailed with tumultuous applause and suddenly thrust into nomination for the district's representative in Congress in opposition to the wealthy and powerful Martin Telfer.

Later in the day Mr. Robert Usher, president of the firm of Usher & Vidal, arrived in Harrowburg unexpectedly, and he immediately relieved Mr. Philip Porter from his duties as the firm's representative and superintendent and ordered him to leave town and report to headquarters.

There was an evening conference at the City Hall between Mr. Usher and the Durfey faction, but it was brief, and the contractor went from the City Hall to call upon Mrs. Norcott at her temporary headquarters in the rooms of the Women's Civic League. There he met Hiram King and Dr. Brockley, who had attached themselves to the staff of the lady reformer, and from them he heard a vivid account of the abuses that had been perpetrated in the name of his old and reputable firm.

"It's very surprising and annoying, Mrs. Norcott," remarked Mr. Usher, who was a distinguished-looking and austere man of business. "We have never before been betrayed into such a muddle by one of our own confidential men. Mr. Porter was acceptable as an architect and engineer, but he has not shown up well in a responsible position. We have had cause to question his executive ability and efficiency, but we did not question his honor. I gather that he was quite plastic in the experienced hands of your mayor."

"I gather that he was an inspiration to Mayor Durfey," said Mrs. Norcott. "Durfey is a man who sees infinite possibilities in the character of a weak and unprincipled person."

"Our firm is greatly at fault, of course," admitted Mr. Usher, "but we are short-handed in the matter of field executives at present. To the good people of Harrowburg the erection of a hospital is a very large and important thing, but this happens to be one of the smallest contracts that we

now have on our hands. I sent you Mr. Porter, hoping for the best, but it was a grave mistake, and the penalty is a serious blot upon our good name."

"If the self-respecting citizens of Harrowburg are successful in the election we shall build the hospital according to the original plans," said the lady. "We are determined that no more work shall be done until a full investigation is made, and until honest persons are in charge of our municipal affairs. I am confident that we shall be successful."

"Our contract with the city," Mr. Usher said anxiously, "should be reviewed and revised to meet the present emergency. I am tempted to cancel it and have nothing more to do with such a questionable enterprise, but if we can be assured of good faith and satisfactory procedure in the future I suppose we may go on."

"If I am elected mayor," Mrs. Norcott informed him loftily, "you may be sure of good faith and proper support, I believe. I am saying nothing of my own ability, Mr. Usher, but the name of Norcott has always been considered something of a guarantee of reliability."

"I am familiar with it," said Mr. Usher, to her vast gratification. "I knew your husband several years ago, and I knew his reputation."

"It still remains—as his monument," said the lady, and looked regally melancholy.

"My time here must be short," Mr. Usher went on, "but I shall have to pay off our own men and send them to another place. Then our tools and equipment must be assembled and stored, pending the resumption of operations. I have no efficient and trustworthy executive to send here at this time, but I should like to keep in touch with the situation. If there were some local man, with ability and character, I might employ him as our temporary representative."

"The only local man I could recommend is my son," said Mrs. Norcott. "Such a statement may create a peculiar impression, but I make it deliberately and sincerely. My son is the senior partner of the firm of Norcott, Cadman and Brockley,

in the hardware trade, and his firm failed to win the contract for materials for the hospital. You may say, therefore, that he cannot be a disinterested party, but he is a Norcott—if you please—and he would sacrifice any personal advantage that might be at stake if they came in conflict with any matter of duty."

"Young Harry Norcott is a good lad," declared old Hiram King quite unexpectedly. "He's a competitor o' mine, and he's hurting my retail trade just because folks like to buy things from 'im. I can't say much for his partners—what I know of 'em—but I been thinking if they ever busted up I'd offer to take Harry into my business as a partner. I'm getting old."

"An excellent young man," remarked Dr. Brockley. "I believe he is making a reputation here quite worthy of the one his father left him as an example."

"Harry Norcott is a young man in a thousand—in ten thousand!" contributed Octavia Wadman fervently. "His character and personality are above reproach. He is of another age."

"Yet, he is very human," added Mrs. Norcott, a little fearfully. "I have lately discovered that he has a man's temper and a man's impatience."

"That is fortunate," commented Mr. Usher dryly, "for the balance must be maintained, even in the character of angels. If I can arrange for an interview with this young paragon to-morrow morning we may arrive at something mutually satisfactory and advantageous."

Meanwhile, in another part of the city, Tom Brockley established the fact that Martin Telfer was closeted with Mayor Dursey and his henchmen at the City Hall, and then hastened to the Telfer residence. He mounted the steps to the front porch somewhat cautiously, and pressed the door-bell very lightly, but Elsie Telfer herself opened the door with astonishing alacrity and accepted the affectionate salute of her lover in a manner that filled him with unearthly joy.

"Twice before I've been here, only to be told that you were out," said Tom mournfully.

"I know it, Tom," she replied, "but you

mustn't blame me. Father gave orders that you were to be turned away whenever you came here; but he'll be out late tonight, I'm sure, and I gave the two maids an evening off and sat by the window to watch for you. Oh, what a change has come into our lives, Tom!—all on account of horrid politics, and that horrid old woman, Jane Norcott!"

"I can't say very much for your father and his politics, after the way he has treated me, Elsie," said Tom. "I was never attacked so outrageously before, without a particle of justification. I can't control my father's actions, but I was blamed for what he did; and I tell you I was treated like a dog by your father—like a yellow dog—a gutter pup—a crawling worm! He acted outrageously!"

"I suspected it," said Elsie sympathetically, "from the way father raved last night. He's not himself when he's all excited over politics. I simply cried all night, and most of the day to-day. It was a shame for him to abuse you so, Tom, and you couldn't do anything to help yourself."

"Couldn't I!" Tom exclaimed with spirit. "Say, Elsie, did he tell you what I said to him?"

"I can't remember all he said about it," she answered wearily, "but he told me some perfectly awful, horrible, terrible things that he called you."

"He didn't get very far, at that," Tom asserted proudly. "I stopped him when he got too personal and offensive. I said, 'Look here, Mr. Telfer, you can't talk to me like that, you know; I won't stand that sort of talk from any man.' And he quit right there. It brought him up short and made him do a little thinking."

"I don't see how you dared," said Elsie fearfully; "he's so terrible when he's angry. Didn't he say anything more to you after that?"

"I hate to tell you what he said," Tom answered with some delicacy. "But he said 'Blah!'—like that; just like an old woman; and then he beat it. I had him dead to rights, you see, and there was nothing more he could say. I tell you, he got out, while the going was good. He lost no time."

"Oh, but it's simply awful to have things like this," she wailed dismally. "What shall we do, Tom? He says you can't come here any more, and he never changes his mind."

"My dear," said Tom rather grandly, "it is up to you! Do you wish to repudiate the troth that you plighted? Was your promise to me merely an empty form of words? Think well, Elsie, before you make your decision! You have to choose between the lover that would give up his life for you, and the father that cares nothing for your real happiness, when his own petty ambitions are at stake. Be a woman! Have some regard for honor and justice, even though your father violates every manly principle!"

"You scare me so, Tom!" she cried. "What do you want me to do?"

"Come with me—now—to-night!" whispered Tom tensely. "We might never meet again. Who knows what that man might do? He might take you away from here, where I couldn't find you."

"But where could we go to-night, Tom?" she whimpered fearfully. "It's an awful thing to—to elope like that. I haven't any clothes ready, and I—"

"Does your future happiness—your whole future life—depend on *clothes*?" he demanded coldly.

"Oh, don't misunderstand me," she begged, beginning to cry. "All men are awful, terrible, frightful! I'm afraid of you, now, I think."

"I am a man, and I must act like a man," he said heroically. "This is no time for idle or silly sentiment. Are you coming with me?"

"Oh, I don't dare refuse you, Tom," she wailed. "I'll pack a suit case and we'd better not wait any longer. But it's awful to think what may happen! Father will be simply insane with rage, and he might kill you if he caught us."

"Hurry up, and he won't catch us," said Tom, practically. "We'll motor over to Milville and get married, and then we'll take the night train for the West. We can stay quietly in some little town until he gets over his rage and calms down. Then he'll be sorry he acted so outrageously."

"Oh, you do give me confidence and courage, Tom," she declared, "you are so brave and fearless."

CHAPTER XX.

IN TOKEN OF CONFIDENCE.

THE newspapers of Harrowburg offered their readers full measure of local sensations the next day. With the whole town humming over the dramatic stand taken by the aristocratic Mrs. Norcott, with the delectable political scandal over the City Hospital developing new thrills hourly, with Telfer and Durfey defying their enemies from the City Hall, it seemed that nothing was lacking in excitement and entertainment for the community, but it remained for the elopement of Elsie Telfer and Tom Brockley to furnish the most sprightly social sensation that the town had known in a decade.

Martin Telfer refused to be interviewed, but he went about town like a man beside himself, and there were some who pitied him. It was reported that he had offered a reward for the apprehension of the abductor of his child, that he declared that the marriage should be annulled; even that he threatened the life of the romantic lover if he should appear again in Harrowburg. But the man, so accustomed to success and satisfaction, could hardly be blamed for any utterances that might be born of the trying moment.

His highest flight of political aspiration had been suddenly flouted and threatened, and his home had been invaded and broken up; then the woes came fast upon each other's heels, and an early afternoon report had the despised Harry Norcott placed in a position of authority as local representative of Usher & Vidal, to dictate terms and conditions to the mayor and his committees.

Harry, on his part, was a busy young man, with his mother's politics and his own sudden plunge into the whirl of public life and responsibility, and he did not visit his own office until the afternoon of the exciting day.

"Congratulations!" exclaimed Dick, a little grudgingly. "You'll be a more promi-

nent man than your mother is if you keep on at this rate."

"Impossible!" Harry returned good humoredly. "I'm willing to work, but I haven't any fireworks to offer. Mother is the prophet and leader of our family, and she'll be Governor of the State before I've learned to sign everything on the dotted line; that seems to be the biggest part of my job so far—red tape, and more red tape."

"Our partner seems to have taken an extended leave of absence, without consulting us," said Dick disgustedly.

"Poor Tom!" sighed Harry. "He's a very impulsive young man, but I'm afraid the impulse to come back and face Martin Telfer won't strike him for a long time. I'm not exactly questioning his courage, but there's no pleasure in meeting a father-in-law in Martin Telfer's present state of mind, and the temptation to prolong the honeymoon will be hard to resist."

"I'm wondering," said Dick mysteriously, with a meaning glance toward Miss Lander, "if Tom has heard anything about a certain matter, and if this romantic journey of his is convenient for him in more ways than one."

"I hardly think he could hear anything," said Harry uneasily, "if Miss Hanby has been careful about keeping the matter a secret."

"Don't worry about Miss Hanby," snapped the other. "For my part, I don't see the need of keeping such a thing secret so long. It ought to be threshed out and settled by this time."

"If you can spare me a moment," said Myrtle Lander suddenly, rising from her chair and coming toward them, "there's a question I've been wanting to ask for some time. You know I asked you to employ a detective to look into the matter of that copy of your estimate falling into the hands of Saxton & Son. I haven't heard anything more about it, and I thought Mr. Evarts had been quite busy with his investigation."

"I wouldn't be too inquisitive if I were you, Miss Lander," said Dick Cadman. "I have an idea that you'll hear all about that investigation when the results are ready for publication."

"Mr. Evarts is expected to make another report before we consider his findings, Miss Lander," Harry explained gently.

"I'm sorry that there's been so much delay," she went on gravely, "because I want to know that the affair is cleared up to your satisfaction before I hand you my resignation. I am leaving just as soon as Mr. Evarts completes his report, and I hope you'll understand my attitude toward the office: conditions have not been at all pleasant for me here for some time, and I don't think that Mr. Cadman or Mr. Brockley will object to my leaving."

"Speaking for myself," said Dick curtly, "I can't say that I should feel like offering any objections."

"I understand your feelings, Miss Lander," Harry hastened to assure her, "but it would hurt me very much if you left us under such conditions. I would like to see all unpleasantness cleared away to everybody's satisfaction, and I believe that Mr. Cadman and Mr. Brockley would be quick to make amends for any rudeness toward you."

"You might as well leave Brockley out," said Dick. "If your man's report was any good, I can't see how Brockley figures on our side of the case."

"There's evidently a good deal of information that I know nothing about, which concerns me in some way," the girl said earnestly. "I'm sorry—I'm very sorry that you can't be frank with me; and I'm more sorry that I should be so readily suspected of anything dishonorable. I don't ask for any privacy or secrecy, you see: I'm willing that Mrs. Gentry, here, should hear anything that may be said."

"But I don't want to hear anything that may be said," spoke up the new stenographer. "My sympathy is all with Miss Lander, and I don't think she deserves the treatment that she is getting here. I'll go out now, with your permission, as I'm not an inquisitive person."

Dick scowled and shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing, and Mrs. Gentry hurried out of the office.

"I want you to know, Miss Lander," said Harry, "and I want Mr. Cadman to know now that I have never seriously considered

you capable of being involved in anything like a conspiracy against this firm. There have been some startling reports, but no matter what circumstantial evidence is offered, I trust you just as completely as I trust my mother."

"What's the use of beating about the bush?" demanded Dick impatiently. "There's no sense in being chicken-hearted about such a thing. You might just as well know, Miss Lander, that suspicion points to you. Tell me, if you don't mind, whether you ever took Mr. Brockley's portable typewriter home with you."

"Certainly, I did," she said quickly, and her face was white. "There was no secret about that. I borrowed it, and I returned it a little later. What has that to do with the case?"

"The copy of our estimate was made on that typewriter," said Dick severely, "and on some blue paper that belonged to Brockley. Furthermore, a certain expert in such matters says that the typewriting was done by you, Miss Lander."

She faced him squarely.

"I don't care what evidence has been submitted," she said. "I deny that I ever saw that estimate, and that I ever did such typewriting. Your information is absolutely false, and I shall prove that it is."

"That statement is quite enough for me!" Harry declared heartily.

"Not for me," said Dick severely. "Perhaps you can explain, Miss Lander, why Mr. Hobart Saxton called at least twice at your home, and wrote one or more letters to you from his office."

"The question is impertinent," she replied quickly, "but I'll answer it. I have met Mr. Hobart Saxton a number of times, and lately he has made himself obnoxious to me. He called at my home twice, to ask me to go out to dinner with him, and I refused quite unceremoniously. Later on, he wrote me an impudent note from his office, apparently to annoy me, and I ignored it. I haven't seen him since, and I can tell you that he has never mentioned business to me. If you have thought that he was trying to persuade me to betray my employers, you have done him an injustice as well as me."

"A moment!" warned Harry. "Somebody is coming in."

The office door opened, and Miss Hanby came in, accompanied by Evarts, the detective.

"I met Mr. Evarts on the street," explained Dick's fiancée gayly, "and he said he was coming here with something for you. I offered to bring it for him, but he wouldn't let me."

"It's something I have to deliver to Mr. Norcott personally," laughed Evarts. "I succeeded in executing your commission, Mr. Norcott, and here is the prize."

He took a small packet of folded blue paper from his pocket, and handed it to Harry, and as the latter slowly transferred it to his own pocket, all the eyes in the room were fixed upon it.

"That's the final exhibit in the case, I believe," Harry remarked, "and when I'm through with it myself, we may know a little more than we do now."

"I think I'll go now, Mr. Norcott," said Myrtle Lander, "and I don't feel that I can come here again. I don't like publicity, but it can hardly be avoided as things are at present. Mr. Cadman has got to be convinced that his charges against me are absolutely groundless, and I shall consult an attorney about what measures I ought to take."

"Dear me! I hope there's not a lot of trouble here!" cried Miss Hanby excitedly. "It's about that horrible old estimate, isn't it? I hope you're not mixed up in it, Myrtle; I'd feel awfully if I thought you were in trouble about any such dirty work as that."

"To avoid coming here again, I'll take all my things with me now, if you don't mind, Mr. Norcott," said Miss Lander, ignoring the sociability of her former office associate.

"I'm sorry that you feel you must go now," said Harry, "but I understand, of course. I wish you might delay your visit to the attorney for a little while, because I believe that I have sufficient information now to settle all doubts and all questions. Mr. Evarts has given us very efficient and helpful service."

Evarts bowed his acknowledgments and went out.

"Do come, Dick," spoke up Lilian Hanby, affecting the weary air of a lady somewhat impatient with office matters beyond her ken. "I came down town to walk home with you, and it's getting late. Can't you come now?"

"Yes," Dick answered crossly, and took up his hat and departed with the girl.

"This has been a trying experience for you, and I'm sorry," Harry said after an awkward pause. "It seems that we've had a good deal of farce comedy in this office ever since we opened it, and I wonder that you have been able to stand it with so much patience."

"Some of it has been difficult," she admitted, "but you have been very kind to me, Mr. Norcott."

"I want to tell you something, Miss Lander," he went on earnestly. "I want you to know how I feel about this miserable affair in the office. You may have guessed that the paper Evarts handed me just now is the actual copy of the estimate, which Saxton & Son are said to have paid a hundred dollars for; that is just what it is. I'm going to send it to-night to an expert judge of typewriting, with some other specimens of typing from this office; but I am doing that without any thought that you could possibly have been connected with the affair in any way."

"You're very kind," she said quietly, "and I appreciate your confidence, Mr. Norcott."

"My confidence goes farther than that," he declared. "I've been terribly disappointed in some of my old friends; I've been pretty sadly disillusioned by some recent experiences; but I still have confidence in you, Miss Lander. Before I send this paper to the expert—before I have any evidence to prove the guilt of any person—I want to prove to you that no suspicion could even lurk in my mind. So I'm going to ask you to marry me, Miss Lander, if you think you could bring yourself to do such a thing."

Miss Lander stared at him in amazement, utterly speechless; then she blushed prodigiously, lowered her eyes, and fairly dropped into a chair.

"It's not a sudden impulse, Miss Lan-

der," he assured her naïvely; "I've loved you for a long time, and wondered how in the world to let you know about it."

"Please don't say any more now," she whispered presently, raising her eyes in a furtive, timorous glance. "I can't talk about any such thing now. I've got to get that awful affair settled and off my mind. And you've scared me so, Mr. Norcott, that I can't talk rationally."

"You might answer some simple questions," he insisted. "You said that Hobart Saxton made himself obnoxious to you, you know. Am I obnoxious to you?"

"No, no, Mr. Norcott; quite the reverse!"

"That's encouraging!" exclaimed Harry. "Now can't you tell me if you think you might ever manage to like me, or—"

"Oh, it isn't that!" she protested, almost petulantly. "I can't be coy; I can't be coquettish like most girls! I've always liked you, Mr. Norcott, ever since I first met you, and—and I—I've loved you for a long time."

"Then how very simple and easy it all is!" cried Harry ecstatically, and kissed her.

"But everybody said you were practically engaged to Miss Wadman," she murmured anxiously, permitting him to hold the two slender hands that he had seized.

"Everybody was wrong," he replied gayly, "and what man could ever be the husband of a female Congressman?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE QUALITY OF MERCY.

NEXT day Harry opened the store with only Eddie Roker and Mrs. Gentry to help him. There was no report from the missing Tom, and the habitually punctual Dick was unaccountably absent; but a little later in the morning a messenger boy brought a hastily scrawled note from Dick, which said:

Very sorry. Unexpectedly called out of town for a week. Hope Tom will be back in time to help you.

DICK

The unceremonious terseness of it was at once annoying and vaguely amusing. It

seemed evident to Harry that the firm was demoralized when Tom would fly off in a wild elopement without a word of warning or apology, and the erstwhile methodical and efficient Dick would depart on some private errand for a week while the store was short-handed and the business in a rather precarious state.

No reasonable person would attempt to analyze the vagaries of Tom, but Harry reflected that this sudden defection on Dick's part might easily mean that he was preparing to quit the ship and seek some connection more advantageous and agreeable to him.

In the emergency Harry sent for Myrtle Lander, and she responded quickly to the call for help. Since her melancholy leave-taking of the previous night had turned so unexpectedly into a charming romance, the office had lost its terrors for her; the trials and tribulations were fading away in a rosy mist, and the mere prospect of being of some service to Harry sent her hurrying back to the place that she had resolved so firmly never to visit again.

The news of Myrtle Lander's abrupt change in status had not yet been conveyed to Mrs. Jane Norcott. Harry saw little of his mother now, for she was strenuous in her campaigning, as in all things, and went home only to sleep; but when they met late in the evening of the next day she was in high spirits, and offered him a convenient opening.

"I must see your charming little book-keeper again," she said. "I remember that she offered me her support, and we must ask her to join us at headquarters some of these evenings."

"Myrtle will be there, I'm sure," he said boldly, and then flushed in sudden confusion. "She will have to be," he hastened to add, with a weak attempt at facetiousness, "now that it is a family affair for her."

"A family affair?" queried his mother casually. "I don't understand."

"I was—er—about to say—er—Myrtle Lander is to have the honor of becoming your daughter-in-law."

Mrs. Norcott gasped, turned pale, and sought a comfortable chair for support.

"Isn't it—glorious, mother?" he said, and looked foolish and uncomfortable.

"I am amazed, Harry!" she said, breathing heavily. "You have never spoken to me of such a thing. I can't comprehend it! The girl is—but yes, I remember, her father was Professor—er—Lander; an intellectual person, of course. But Octavia! Octavia will be—No, I shouldn't say that, for she is a woman of intelligence and fortitude. But she waited for you all these years, Harry."

"That was good of her," he said uneasily, "but you see I couldn't fill the order. Octavia will be much happier in Congress. I'm not qualified to be placed on a pedestal; I should always be falling off and having to be picked up and put back."

"Your father was excessively modest and self-effacing," she observed. "Perhaps we have made a mistake in dwelling too much upon your merits. But you have certainly asserted yourself and maintained your independence. I suppose I must accept the situation philosophically. I have my duty to the community, and it would not do to get upset at such a time. We will talk of—of your great happiness, my dear, after I have had time to think. Of course, I shall see the dear girl soon, and talk with her, too."

"I'm sure that Myrtle is looking forward to that pleasure, mother," he said, but looked a little nervous and doubtful.

The week of Dick's absence passed quickly for those who had assumed the whole task of running the store, and Harry realized that the firm was doing no small amount of business for one in which there had been so much disaffection and friction.

The counter trade was lively, and made it hard for him to assist Myrtle with the correspondence and office routine, which was showing a steady increase in mail order business with the county towns and rural districts. Tom Brockley, as outside man, had not appreciably built up his end of the sales department, but the customers were learning that there was a distinct policy of reliable service and square dealing back of the business of Norcott, Cadman & Brockley, and Harry had developed the affable

and quick-witted Eddie Roker into a salesman with a following among the buyers.

Dick came back on the seventh day from that of his departure, and Harry greeted him pleasantly, without reference to his unceremonious manner of taking a vacation. But Dick's attitude was one of sullen independence and defiance, and he seemed to resent the presence of Myrtle in the office.

"You are still with us, I see, Miss Lander," he said as he went to his desk, and there was a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"I was very fortunate," said Harry at once. "You left us without warning, you know, and it would have been very awkward if Miss Lander had not consented to come back and help us out in the emergency. She had given up her position, you'll remember, but—Miss Lander and I are to be married soon, and she was very glad to be able to help me."

"Miss Lander—and *you*!" exclaimed Dick, and there was something distinctly and frankly offensive in his manner.

"We have been engaged just a week," said Harry, and waited calmly for further remarks.

"Strange things happen in this world of ours," said Dick ironically. "As you evidently are subject to sudden impulses yourself, perhaps it won't surprise you to hear that I am married."

"*Married!*" Harry gasped, in a whisper that was scarcely audible. "Dick! you are married to—to Lilian Hanby?"

"Why not?" challenged the other. "It was sudden, to be sure, but I felt that I was entitled to a short vacation. There are not many people who are interested in our affairs here in town, and we decided all at once to follow Tom's example—in a less romantic way. We eloped—so to speak, but without disturbing any one particularly. Mrs. Cadman is living at my old home for the present; we shall start housekeeping a little later."

Harry was obviously stunned, as by a blow, and Myrtle Lander seemed strangely agitated.

Presently Harry asked Mrs. Gentry to go out and remain away from the office until after the luncheon hour, and when she had gone he closed and locked the door.

"You've given me a big problem, Dick," he said gravely, "but I've found the solution already—there was only one possible."

Dick turned his chair around and faced his partner, looking rather startled and annoyed.

"What's the matter?" he inquired coldly. "Why not send Miss Lander out, too?"

"It concerns her too much," Harry replied. "I have had a report from the professional typewriting expert that I consulted; it came the day before yesterday, and I've been waiting for you to get back. The results didn't surprise me so much, and the conclusion of the affair seemed fairly simple, but now you have added very serious complications to it."

"Let's not be mysterious!" Dick exclaimed, already exasperated. "Say what you've got to say."

"You may examine these papers and read the expert's report," said Harry, taking a bulky envelope from his pocket. "It would be interesting to any one that was not intimately concerned, but it's shocking to me. At the bottom of the whole affair there's nothing but a stupid case of an employee selling information to a competitor of the employer; it's common enough in business. But the method that was employed was vicious, and cruel, and dangerous!"

"The forgery of handwriting is nothing unusual," he went on, "but here we have the novelty of forged typewriting. I sent samples of the typing of every person in this office to the expert, and you'll see that his report is elaborate. To the casual glance of an amateur in such work, like Mr. Evarts, it seemed evident that the copy of our estimate on the City Hospital contract was made for Saxton & Son by Miss Lander. Evarts, with his magnifying glass, identified the type of Tom's portable machine; then he traced Miss Lander's peculiarities in the writing: she mixed her b's and v's, and her touch was somewhat erratic. But to the expert the writing tells a far, far different story."

"He discovers at once that the copy was made by a trained typist, using all the fingers of both hands, with a touch uniform-

ly light and accurate. From examples of Miss Lander's typing he finds that she writes with the two forefingers, like many amateurs, and with a nervous, uncertain touch. Then, with an uncanny skill and perception, he discovers that the writer of the copy had made a study of Miss Lander's typing, and tried very artfully to imitate it, evidently in order to cast any possible suspicion upon Miss Lander. The forgery was very clever, the expert says, but it is hard for the professional to imitate the novice. The use of Brockley's blue paper and his machine were merely an added precaution; they were easy to get at here in the office."

Dick got up and stood facing Harry with his feet braced apart.

"What do you mean?" he demanded sharply. "Out with it!"

"I wish I could let you down easy, Dick," said the other, "but you must have guessed it already. The expert absolutely identifies the writing of the forgery with the samples of your wife's writing. For myself, I knew well enough that she was the guilty one before I consulted this expert, but I needed confirmation."

Dick turned around and sat down limply in his chair, all the defiance and fight gone out of him.

"What about Brockley?" he asked in a dull tone. "What about Saxton & Son? I suppose you've taken up the matter with them?"

"No, I haven't," said Harry; "I've left that for you to do, if you want to. I've exonerated Tom Brockley to my own satisfaction: the case is complete without him. And I don't care to have a rumpus with Saxton & Son over such a miserable, unpleasant affair."

"I've talked it all over with Miss Lander, and we find that your wife was out of sorts with you about the time that the estimate was made out; she told Miss Lander that she had evidently failed to make a hit with you, you were so curt with her. Your wife is a thrifty person, and she was probably tempted by an offer from the Saxtons."

"Dick, I don't want to carry the investigation further, but I think it would de-

velop that she suggested to Hobart Saxton that he should let it appear that he was seeking interviews with Miss Lander.

"There's a very shrewd cunning in the whole scheme, and you'll remember that it was allowed to be known in the Saxton office that Hobart was writing personal letters to Miss Lander."

Harry held out the packet of papers to Dick, and he took them, shuffled the various pages and slips, glancing at them almost listlessly, and then selected the expert's report and read it slowly without a change of expression.

Presently he folded up all the papers and replaced them in the large envelope and handed it back.

"All right," he said harshly, "I guess I'm satisfied. I shall write a letter to my wife. She has relatives in Buffalo; perhaps she will go to them. I don't think I shall see her again."

"Oh!" cried Myrtle Lander in consternation, then seemed to regret the involuntary outburst.

"Miss Lander and I have finished with the case now," said Harry, quietly. "We prefer to forget it, as much as we can. Do you think, Dick, that you should be less charitable than we are?"

"I think," said Dick tragically, "that I am the most injured party. Perhaps that woman should be allowed to speak for herself; I don't know. I feel that I've been duped—I've been made a fool of, by an adventuress. I can see through a lot of things now! She went after me, from the very first, like the schemer that she is; and she got me, didn't she?"

"That last day here she heard what you said, and she thought the game might be turning against her. That's why she took me out and got temperamental right away. She said I was growing indifferent to her—that she was jealous—that I was cruel and unfeeling. She made me feel like a dog, and I lost my head completely and let her stage a romantic marriage. No, I don't want to see her again!"

"If you'll allow me to speak, on the woman's side, Mr. Cadman," said Myrtle gently, "do you really think that the girl made a great conquest? I mean that per-

haps she really loves you. You're not a wealthy man, you know, and a poor man is not a great attraction for an adventuress. And if you'll forgive me for being terribly frank, I don't think that you would win the admiration of many women; you are too self centered and conceited, Mr. Cadman."

"I thank you for your frankness, I'm sure," said Dick grimly.

"We've been friends for a long time, Dick," Harry said solemnly, "and I'd like to see you be something like the boy I used to know as Dick Cadman. I wish you might meet this shock and rise above it like the man you started out to be. You engaged yourself to this girl, presumably while in your right mind; now you have married her, and I suppose you vowed to take her '*for better for worse*.' To us, here in the office, she seemed hardly a superior person, but you were willing to take her. Now she needs your help and protection as she may never need them again. I would have spared you and her, but justice had to be done, for the sake of my *fiancée*. Your wife is already sufficiently punished, I think, by her fears and her conscience.

"There's a type of man, Dick," he continued, "that is superior to the accidents of circumstance and the weaknesses of human nature. I'd like to see you be a gentleman and a sportsman, in the old-fashioned sense. The girl is emotional, sensitive, and jealous, by nature, but Miss Lander and I think that she loves you. If your positions were reversed, she would probably stick to you and defend you. You married her and you ought to be man enough to be her husband."

"I'll go home," said Dick huskily; "I'll go home and talk with her," and he took his hat and shuffled out of the office.

"Oh, but you were perfectly splendid, dear!" exclaimed Myrtle fervently.

"Please don't do that!" cried Harry, taking her fondly in his arms and kissing her. "My mother has done all that she can to accomplish my ruin. You must be a *wife* to me. Your job is to keep down my conceit and maintain a balance. Put me in my place with the deadly frankness that you used on Dick Cadman just now,

and we shall be able to remember that we're human; then we shall live happily ever after."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HERITAGE.

THE morning newspapers of the following day dropped a barrage of journalistic bombshells upon Harrowburg, upsetting the political calculations of the oldest and wisest inhabitants, and throwing into helpless confusion the conservative standpatters who were aligned against the encroachments of the militant women and all other vigorous reformers.

At a citizens' mass meeting in the Opera House on the previous evening, Jane Norcott had announced in clarion, contralto tones, that she had persuaded the Governor of the State to appoint a commission of five of the State's most illustrious legislators, to descend upon Harrowburg and investigate the mayor, the board of aldermen, the city council and every department and committee that appertained to the administration of Mayor Roscoe Durfey.

The mayor's own clique filled the balcony of the Opera House, and Mrs. Norcott was hissed, hooted and rudely heckled, but she gained strength and power as the tumult raged and talked her tormentors down—and some of them out, with the help of certain stalwart supporters of the Women's Civic League.

"My answer to Mayor Durfey's yelping jackals," shouted the robust lady, "is that I am a Norcott! The name is known in Harrowburg! When the Norcotts make promises they keep them, and when the Norcotts assume duties, they live to perform them!"

The applause was awe inspiring, and conservative prophets declared that Mrs. Norcott was as good as elected there and then. Men and women hurried away from the meeting and addressed street gatherings from motor cars and soap-boxes, and the excitement was prolonged into the late hours.

Then, before the morning papers sent their city editions to press, the heaviest

bombshell was loaded into the biggest gun. Martin Telfer, head of the street railway system, and candidate for Congress, called the reporters together at the Hotel Harrow and gave them a story.

He had just completed a personal and private investigation, he declared, and he was amazed, shocked, staggered and utterly undone by revelations of the corruption and duplicity of Mayor Durfey. He cared nothing, he said, for what might happen to his own political chances, for he had ever tried to be the people's champion and the upholder of justice and clean government. He wished the voters of Harrowburg to learn from their morning papers that he repudiated Mayor Durfey and all that the man stood for, and that his lot was now cast with the supporters of Mrs. Jane Norcott, whose candidacy he was resolved to support with all the zeal and energy of which he was capable.

A hastily scrawled cartoon, by a local artist, showed Mr. Telfer as a motorman, piloting a street car on which the Victorian Mrs. Norcott sat regally enthroned while she wielded a heavy scepter upon the heads of luckless political grafters; and the papers were not merciful to Mr. Telfer in their editorial comments, but it was evident that he had seen the handwriting on the wall, and he was an experienced and sagacious politician.

Mayor Durfey applied stronger and more picturesque adjectives in describing the sort of politician that he considered Mr. Telfer, but his remarks were rejected as unprintable by the newspaper copy readers.

Under cover of the battle smoke, Tom and Elsie Brockley stole quietly back to Harrowburg, for Tom's funds were running low, and it was hoped that the now inspired and regenerated Mr. Telfer might declare an amnesty in favor of his rebellious daughter and her scapegrace bridegroom.

So it came about that there was once more a conference of the firm of Norcott, Cadman & Brockley.

Dick had nothing to tell Harry of the talk that he had with his wife, but he mentioned rather sheepishly that they were taking a small apartment in which to set up a home of their own. Then Tom ar-

rived, not tumultuously as had been his habit, but entering the familiar door with a furtive, timorous air, as though he were consciously intruding.

At a mere look from Harry, the tactful Mrs. Gentry left her desk and joined Eddie Roker in the store outside.

"Well, here we are again," said Harry, almost blithely.

"Yes," said Dick very heavily.

"Yes," said Tom bitterly, "I've come back to resign from the firm, if you'll let me."

"Of course, it can't go on any longer," Dick asserted with gloomy conviction. "I have stayed here—much against my will—because I didn't feel that I could desert you after all that had happened, Harry. But the business is looking up; everything seems to be coming your way, and it's pretty certain that your mother won't lose her investment. The best thing I can do for you, I think, is to get out now."

"That's the way I feel about myself," muttered Tom miserably. "I guess I've only got one friend in the world now, and that's my wife. She doesn't know me as well as others do. We're going to live at her home for awhile. Her father has—well, he's forgiven us, after a fashion, and he's willing to give me a job in the street railway offices."

"That's encouraging," Harry remarked. "It sounds mighty fine!"

"You wouldn't think so if you'd heard it all," said Tom. "Say, I didn't know that some of the words he used were in the language! What does a college education amount to, anyway? I can't remember all the things he compared me to, but he didn't say much about animals—except that he didn't know of any dumb animals as low down as I was."

"I suppose you stood for it?" said Dick contemptuously.

"Stood for it?" Tom murmured without spirit. "Oh, yes, there was nothing else to do. The worst of it was, you see, he was dead right! I'm just getting acquainted with myself. I'm nothing but a flash-in-the-pan."

"Elsie says—she's an angel—she says I've been abused so much that my spirit

is broken; but she doesn't know. I haven't been abused in the right way; somebody ought to have tied me up and horse-whipped me till I got some sense. Everybody was right—I've been the big noise! I guess I was cut out for the ballyhoo artist in the sideshow. But listen here! No one will ever hear me talk again; hereafter I'll whisper if I've got anything to say at all."

"In repentance there is salvation," said Harry, smiling ruefully to hide his own embarrassment.

"Then I'm saved," Tom muttered, "but they ought to bury me quick."

"It's a strange last act for our comedy, isn't it?" remarked Dick. "In a way, I feel a good deal as Tom does. I'm a flash-in-the-pan, too! I've tried to do right, and I've gone wrong every time. I've worked and studied, and I've sacrificed everything to efficiency and success, but all I've got for it is failure; and I've made an ass of myself generally.

"It isn't easy to eat crow like this, Harry, but you've got it coming to you. Tom and I have treated you like a kid. We were going to educate you in modern business, and you've put us in the wrong and shown us up every time. I'm proud to admit it; it's the most decent thing I've done since we've been together here."

"I'm not in a very comfortable position myself," said Harry seriously. "I'm not a judge or a father-confessor, you know. I don't think I'm quite prepared to be set up as the redeeming grace in this business. I know that I've preached a good deal, and I've called you fellows some pretty hard names at times. I'm proud of my family, but the Norcotts are always in danger of worshipping the fetich of the family above all other gods. I'd like to be simply human, in the right way—going straight and keeping my balance."

"You'll go straight, and you'll keep your balance," Dick predicted. "You'll get along better without us, too. The business is growing, almost entirely through your efforts and your principles. Your mother will be elected mayor, and everything will come your way—rightfully, too, because you'll deserve it. You'll be one of the biggest men in Harrowburg in a few years.

I didn't know I could stand another man so many stiff compliments, but my conscience is riding me hard just now."

"Say! I'll subscribe my name to all you've said, Dick," spoke up the broken and contrite Tom. "I want to get out of here and keep myself out of sight until I can hold my head up, but I'm wishing Harry all the good things that can come to a man. I won't say any more, because I've quit talking."

"The thought often occurs to me," said Harry reflectively, "what a grand thing it would be, when everything has gone absolutely wrong, if we could wipe the slate clean and start the problems all over again. Too bad the human mind isn't like a blackboard; you could erase all the figures and the scribbling, and then work out your equation by another method; it would finally come out right, if you kept on working.

"I want to tell you, boys," he went on feelingly, "that I'd like to have you stay here. It seems to me that we've washed our dirty linen until it ought to come out pretty white. Remorse is mighty good for the soul, and you've both spilled a lot of it here before me. I'm glad that you've both come to such a state of mind—it justifies so much that I've said and thought; but I feel as though I ought to remind you that you're not criminals, you're not desperately depraved creatures.

"I guess we might sum it all up," he continued hopefully, "by saying that we are simply *Tom, Dick and Harry!* Those three names have always stood for the average men in the world. The Toms, and Dicks, and Harrys make up our civilization, and they have the usual human weaknesses, and follies, and frailties; but they have also the natural human tendency to pull up before it's too late, and be decent and right.

"There are only a few great geniuses and leaders on earth at one time, you know, and what would the world do without a few million Toms, and Dicks, and Harrys?"

A childlike, choking sob came suddenly from Tom.

"I say," spoke up Dick, in a suspiciously throaty voice, "we'll all be making fools of ourselves in a minute."

"Why not?" inquired Harry. "Every Tom, Dick and Harry has a right to make a fool of himself once in awhile, it's his heritage."

"I'd like to stay here, Harry," said Dick hoarsely. "I'd like to stay and make good. I believe now that I could do it."

Tom blew his nose violently.

"I'd like to stay, too," he announced fervently. "I'd like to stay right here and tell my father-in-law to go to the devil! I'll learn to do business, and I'll stop talking about it, too. I wish I could think that we three could keep on here for the rest of our lives, and make good all the way, and always be friends. I'd like to grow old like that, in company with Dick and Harry. And I'd like to think that our wives would be friends, and the families would always stick together."

"Don't look for that, Tom," said Harry

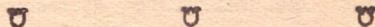
quickly, with a slight touch of humor. "There have been lots of Toms, and Dicks, and Harrys who have stuck together for life, but it's not in human nature for their wives to do the same."

There was a loud, peremptory knock on the door, and Harry stepped back and opened it, to admit the cross and crabbed old Hiram King.

"Look here, I want to talk business with this firm," said the visitor, glaring at the trio. "I've been held up outside for a quarter of an hour. That young man out there said the firm was in conference, and he would attend to me; but I'm not telling my business to every blamed Tom, Dick and Harry!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. King," Harry laughed, "but it's the best we can do for you. Here's the firm—all present: Tom, Dick and Harry."

THE END



THE ARGOSY

THREE is a galleon with a purple sail,
Beyond some headland, beating home to me;
Borne on a wind whose pulsings never fail,
She brings a cargo from beyond the sea.

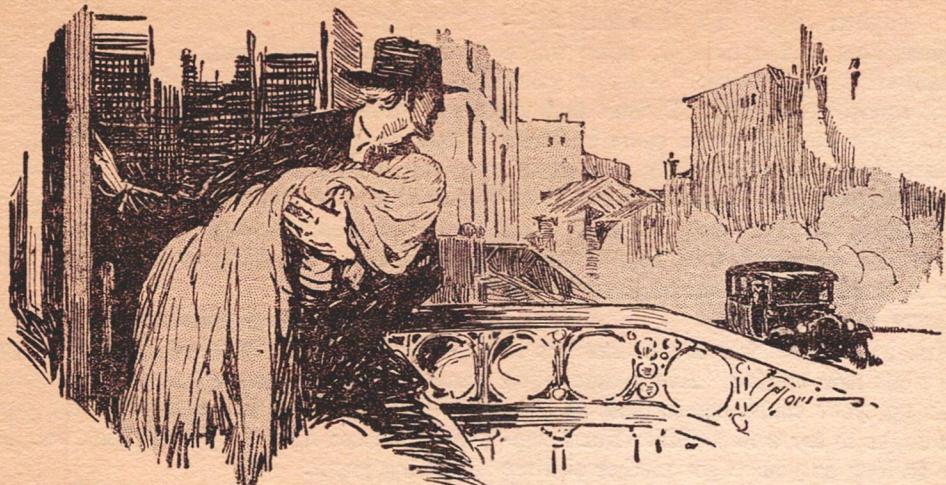
Her hold is filled with bales of golden dreams
And caskets brimmed with gems of memory;
And from her mast the pennon-fold that streams
Is broidered with the silk of minstrelsy.

There is no crew to raise and set her sail,
No helmsman grim to hold her rudder true;
But still she will not veer to any gale
Or any tide her course may lead her through.

I sent this argosy long years of yore
To gain a cargo from the ports of Time,
And trade my youth, the stock I had in store,
For dreams and memories and bits of rime.

I do not know what day your questing prow
Around life's headland will arouse my hail.
But I am ready for your cargo now,
O golden galleon with the purple sail!

W. A. Brewer, Jr.



Something Worth While

By **GORDON STILES**

IDON'T believe," said Mr. Amos Morehouse, "that I can eat any breakfast this morning."

Instantly three pairs of eyes out of a possible four were turned upon the speaker. The first pair belonged to Mrs. Amos Morehouse and the look in them was a combination of helpless pleading and resignation. The second pair—those of Amos's eldest daughter, Mrs. Ann Dudley—carried pure and unalloyed contempt. The third scrutiny came from Ann's sixteen-year-old sister, Eloise, and registered annoyance coupled with a wish that the coming few minutes were over and done with. The one person who seemed undisturbed was Jane, aged three and daughter of Ann.

Both of the elder women were dressed for the street—rather for their work which kept Ann busy all day in Gracey's department store while from nine to six, Mrs. Morehouse waited on counter at the local branch of a big dairy—except for those occasional periods when neuralgia kept her in bed for days at a time. If it were not for the fact that the local manager was a

sympathetic and human individual, Mrs. Morehouse never could have held her job. Which would have been a serious matter since it involved twelve dollars a week. Ann earned seventeen dollars.

The weekly total thus attained represented the entire income of the family over which Amos Morehouse was supposed to preside. Ann, whose husband had died when Jane was eight months old, was really the dominant figure.

Amos made no pretense of meeting the looks directed at him; he stared listlessly at his plate while Eloise, despite his opening remark, placed coffee, toast and a couple of boiled eggs before her male parent, then turned her attention to little Jane who, having splashily consumed her oatmeal, was demonstrating that bits of toast will float on milk.

Mrs. Morehouse cleared her throat and said: "But, Amos, if you're going over to see about that position Mr. Frisbie spoke of, you ought to eat some breakfast. You oughtn't to go without breakfast."

Mr. Morehouse who was tentatively fin-

gering an egg, put it back in the saucer and coughed into his handkerchief—coughed long and hackingly, after which he said in a weak voice: "I'm not going—this morning, anyway. I don't feel up to it. This danged cough came back on me last night so that I hardly slept at all. I don't believe the Dennis Baking Company has a job I'd want, anyway. And if they did, it wouldn't be fair of me to take it, used up as I am and not fit for a decent day's work."

Mrs. Morehouse half opened her lips to reply, but Ann cut in: "Every time a job looms up, your cough comes back on you. You ought to try a new alibi. But I suppose as long as you've got mother and me to bring in enough to keep us all alive, you don't think it necessary." Her tone was ungracious and her eyes snapped.

"Oh, Ann!" began Mrs. Morehouse, alarm in her voice.

"Oh, nothing!" countered Ann. "You know it's so. You'd think father was a feeble old man to hear both of you talk. He's only fifty-nine. That isn't old. Here you are, going out to work at fifty and I'll bet you have more days in a year when you aren't fit to work than he does."

Mr. Morehouse lifted injured eyes to his daughter; seemed about to speak. But a fresh spasm of coughing seized him. When this had subsided he said, weakly but with dignity: "Nobody regrets the situation more than I do. You know that I always managed to support my family—that is, up to my illness six years ago. And presently I shall be able to do so again. Your remarks are unfeeling and unjustified. I resent them!" His slightly watery blue eyes came as near to flashing as they could.

The two women rose from the table simultaneously. Ann said: "Oh, rats!" and jammed down her hat with tight lips. Mrs. Morehouse had one more try.

"You're not going over there, then? You told Mr. Frisbie you would. He said they'd hold the place open until they see you. He said it wasn't hard work, you know, Amos."

"Perhaps I'll go to-morrow. Feeling the way I do this morning, it would be no use. Maybe to-morrow—"

The door closed behind his wife and daughter.

Mr. Morehouse glanced at Eloise who had been washing the soiled hands of Jane and was now removing the breakfast things from the places which had been occupied by her mother and sister. He felt relieved now that the others were away. Ella—that was what she had been christened—wouldn't say anything to him about that danged job.

He watched the girl make ready to wash the dishes. As he watched he ate the eggs and toast and drank the coffee. He coughed a couple of times as he fumbled for pipe and tobacco; lighted up and shook out the morning paper.

The front page carried an account of the latest drive against Rum Row. Mr. Morehouse read it with rising indignation.

"Dang 'em," he muttered. "There was a time when a man could get a little something decent to drink, and reasonable. I'd kill this cough of mine in a week if I could wet my throat once in awhile. Gosh! It makes me sick when I think of the times I used to have with Frisbie and the gang. Bet I wouldn't know a shot of good rye or Scotch if I found one—it's been so long."

There is no doubt that Mr. Morehouse's lot was a hard one. In the days to which he referred he had been making all of fifty dollars a week as a bookkeeper and, as he had said to his daughter, he had managed to support his family. Suppose he had been a bit unsteady once or twice a week when he came home. He knew how to carry his liquor, he flattered himself. And the few dollars he passed over the bar at Fred's place down there in Fulton Street, had not caused any particular hardships at home, he reasoned.

Then had come pneumonia followed by a siege of muscular rheumatism and the ultimate loss of his job after six months' absence. It had been tough. But his brother out in Fort Wayne had left him eleven hundred dollars which had helped a lot. In fact, Mr. Morehouse had felt like a man of parts for a year or so, before the eleven hundred and the small nest egg his wife had put away, were exhausted.

The depletion of these funds surprised

Mr. Morehouse—it came so suddenly. He was nowhere well enough to hunt a new job, he knew, in spite of Mary's mild but pointed inquiries about the possibilities in that respect. That cough kept recurring and prohibition came romping in about then, to take away the best remedy there was, in his opinion.

Mr. Morehouse knew vaguely that there had been some talk of finances between Mary and Ann. Also, he more than suspected that Ann, whose husband was doing well enough at the time, advanced certain small sums to her mother now and then. But he really was not fit enough to take any great interest in things.

He had protested when Mary had insisted on their moving into the Bronx flat at forty dollars a month and he had felt really hurt when she went out and got a job with the dairy company. But probably because he was not really a well man, these things lost their keenness after a bit and somehow, matters seemed to go on fairly well.

When Ann's husband died and she brought little Jane home with her, there were some bad quarter hours when Mary and Ann seemed determined that Mr. Morehouse should interest himself again in business. They persistently tried to get him to commit himself to some program which had to do with a new position. And a man in his condition could not possibly be definite.

So in the end, Eloise had taken on most of the housework and the care of the baby, out of school hours and all the time in vacations. Ann took the best that offered in the line of work and the family had settled into the groove it was wearily traveling at the opening of this story.

Mr. Morehouse finished his paper, sat by the open window, cutting the cake out of his pipe. There was a whistle at the dumb waiter; the janitor below called up to Eloise that she was wanted at the telephone. When she came upstairs again, Mr. Morehouse looked inquiringly at his youngest.

Eloise stammered: "It was Dan, father. He wants me to go to a matinée this afternoon. Somebody gave him two tickets. And I—I—say, daddy, do you think you could do something for me?"

"What is it?" asked Mr. Morehouse guardedly.

"Why, I wonder—don't you suppose you could take care of Jane out in the park this afternoon so I could go with Dan?"

"What, me?" exclaimed Mr. Morehouse. "Ann would have a fit."

"I know it. But there's nothing to do. You just have to watch her while she plays and Ann wouldn't know. I could come back and get her before they come home. Please, daddy. I do want to go."

Mr. Morehouse frowned a little. But, after all, he might as well be in the park as anywhere on this July afternoon. And Ella was sixteen. He supposed Dan Corbin or some other boy would be chasing around after her from now on. So he said: "All right, Ella. But mind you, come around in plenty of time."

The girl stifled her annoyance at the "Ella" and said: "Fine. I'll go down and call Dan up. I said I'd let him know." She hurried out.

II.

WHEN at five thirty that afternoon Eloise joined Mr. Morehouse and his small charge at the designated spot in Bronx Park, she found both in high good humor albeit Jane was palpably tired. The child told excitedly about having been given candy by a nice man.

Mr. Morehouse was expansive and enthusiastic. So much more so than was his wont that his daughter glanced at him curiously more than once during their brief interview.

She said: "It wasn't so bad, was it, daddy?"

"No, indeed, Ella. No, indeed! In fact, daughter, I enjoyed it."

"I'm so glad. I'll rush home now with Jane. Don't say a word to Ann, will you?"

"No. I'll be right along—in a little while. Have a good time yourself!"

"Lovely!"

"That's good, daughter. Have a good time." He patted her shoulder affectionately and she was startled to recognize an odor which she recalled from other days—those days when Mr. Morehouse and Frisbie and others foregathered at Fred's.

Only occasionally—very occasionally—had she caught that odor, the breath of Scotch whisky, in recent years. But it was unmistakable; also too well associated with more or less argumentative passages between her mother and father. Now she was curious, but refrained from comment. She hurried home with the baby.

III.

MR. MOREHOUSE strolled leisurely in the direction of his home. He was entirely at peace with the world, except that now and then the recollection of the morning's unpleasantness cropped up for a second or two. But Mr. Morehouse was in a mood to dismiss it now. The Scotch which he had imbibed had set his blood coursing smoothly through his veins and had brought a mellow feeling to his heart.

As for the women at home—well, he fancied he'd show them a trick or two one of these days! Always wanting him to go out and take a piker job that never would amount to anything! When he ran across the right opening, he'd take it all right. And it would be worth while.

They could call him lazy if they wanted to. But it was better to be lazy for a few years if at the end of that time a fellow landed something real—something that would mean prosperity. He'd be danged if he would ever put up with the piffling line of work he used to follow. Not Amos Morehouse!

He reached home at about the same time as his wife and daughter. Jane was reporting that she had been given candy and added: "Jane an' gran'pa."

Ann raised her brows inquiringly. "Grandpa?" she said.

Eloise hastily interposed: "Yes. Daddy came out there for a few minutes this afternoon," and looked hard at her father.

"Yes," said Mr. Morehouse, "I happened around that way. Thought the sun would help my cough. It did, too."

Mrs. Morehouse, who had come close to her husband in the course of putting her street things away, sniffed, looked at her spouse and asked: "Where had you been before that?"

"Just for a walk, my dear."

"My dear!" his wife murmured under her breath, and set about getting dinner.

Thrusts, the barbs of which were thinly coated, failed to annoy Mr. Morehouse that evening. His wife wondered; Ann wondered—where he had got it. Neither made so bold as to inquire, however.

Finally Mrs. Morehouse asked: "Think you'll go to see those people to-morrow, Amos?"

"No!" he replied vehemently. "Not to-morrow or any other day. I'll land something suitable or nothing at all. I'm through with measly jobs that take all a man's got and give him nothing in return."

"I suppose you've got something quite grand in mind," Ann said sarcastically.

"When I locate what I believe to be a proper opening, I shall inform the family," returned Mr. Morehouse, rising and making a little sweeping gesture with his arm. With which he stalked out of the room.

IV.

It was along about eleven o'clock next morning when Mr. Morehouse said to Eloise: "You know, Ella, I rather enjoyed taking Jane out yesterday. Just as soon take her again to-day."

"Thanks, daddy. But I can manage it all right to-day. Nothing I want to do, particularly."

"But I'd really like to take her."

Eloise laughed. "Oh, well. All right. I guess I can find something to amuse myself. Sure you want to, daddy?"

"Sure," he said, with enthusiasm.

Eloise looked a bit doubtful. "You won't tell Ann? And you won't—"

"My dear child. You just leave it to me. And come for Jane at the same time you did last night. You needn't worry a bit. Anyway, you ought not to be tied up so, every day."

So it was arranged and in some mysterious manner Eloise stumbled upon Dan or he upon her. It didn't matter much. They were together.

Four days later Eloise repaired to the spot where she usually met her father and

the baby. During all that time Mr. Morehouse had played nursemaid and Eloise had indulged in a riot of freedom. She had worried a little in the fear that the others would make something out of the child's excited and disconnected chatterings, but nothing had come of it so far. Every night Mr. Morehouse had carried home the breath of "Highland Dew" and had parried all efforts to draw forth an explanation.

But to-night neither man nor child were to be seen. Eloise waited five minutes—ten minutes, before she began to feel alarm. Then it was more because she might be late getting home than anxiety for Jane or her father. But when a half hour passed with no signs of the truants real trouble loomed over her.

Whatever had become of them? Could her father have taken too much drink? And where on earth was the stuff coming from, anyway? An hour late! The folks would be at home and wondering.

Her distracted mind set about reasoning the thing out. In the end, she decided that it would be best to go home and face the music—say that she had left Jane with her father while she did an errand. No doubt they would turn up all right, and the worst that could befall her would be a sharp scolding from Ann.

Perhaps—she seized upon the thought, her father might have become a bit muddled and gone straight home. Thither she hurried.

She discarded this idea instantly as she entered the house. "Where is Jane?" burst simultaneously from both of the waiting women.

"I don't know. I had to do an errand and I asked daddy to look out for her for a few minutes. When I came back they were gone. Oh, I'm so sorry, Ann," as she caught the terror in her sister's eyes.

Ann was beside herself. Her voice choked.

"Oh, the baby's been run over or hurt some way! I know it! Nothing else could keep them out like this! And you, you promised you'd never let her out of your sight! You promised. I'm going to call the police." She grasped her hat with trembling fingers.

Eloise sobbed miserably. Mrs. Morehouse tried to be calm. "If anything like that had happened they would notify us at once. It's queer, but I guess it will be all right. Your father ought to be able to take care of Jane for awhile, I should think. He—" She stopped short and her eyes met those of Ann.

The latter burst out afresh. "Yes! He had! You know what he's been up to lately. Where he gets it I don't know. He never has more than a dollar at a time. Oh, I know something's happened! I—"

What more she would have said is not known, because at that moment the door opened and Mr. Morehouse entered, carrying Jane in his arms. Ann sprang at him fiercely, but he waved her back. "Shush," he said, "she's asleep."

With the fortitude of a witness at a Congressional investigation, Mr. Morehouse withstood the indignant questions hurled at him during the succeeding hour. He refused point-blank to answer a single query.

"Jane is here and she's all right, isn't she?" was the burden of his remarks. "You should have known that she'd be all right with me."

In despair his inquisitors gave up, and at last the family retired.

Eloise had held her peace thankfully, but next morning she tried her hand. But with no better results. Mr. Morehouse stood pat. Nothing was said about his taking Jane out again. At ten o'clock he put on his hat and sallied into the street. He made his way unwaveringly to an apartment house around the corner of the next block. To the janitor, lolling in the areaway, Mr. Morehouse said: "Seen anything of Dan Corbin this morning?"

"Sure," was the answer. "He went down that way 'bout ten minutes ago. Prob'ly you'll find him in Leary's garage."

Mr. Morehouse thanked his informant and set out for the garage.

Dan Corbin was there, sure enough, talking with a group of youngsters much like himself, free from school and with time on their hands, but no money in their pockets. Mr. Morehouse beckoned to Dan, who came over, wonderingly.

"See here, Dan, you and my girl have

been running around a little of late, haven't you?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Morehouse. A little."

"Well, can you keep your mouth shut if I ask you to do me a favor?"

Dan nodded.

"Then," continued Mr. Morehouse, "here's ten dollars. You call up Ella and tell her you want to take her to Coney Island. Go down early and have lunch there. Then be sure to get back by five o'clock. Can you fix it?"

Dan grinned. "Call this a favor to you, Mr. Morehouse? I'd say 'twas a big one to me. I been dyin' to take Eloise down there all summer, an' she's been dyin' to go. But I've had no jack—not enough. Sure, Mr. Morehouse, I'll see can I fix it."

"All right. Hurry up. But don't say a danged word to anybody."

"I won't," Dan said, and was off. Mr. Morehouse went swiftly back to the flat.

Eloise came back from the resultant telephone call looking miserable indeed. She seemed on the point of tears, and without a word started to polish the dining table with quite unnecessary vigor, biting her lips the while. Mr. Morehouse watched her for a moment, then said, "What's the matter, Ella?"

"Don't call me that!" she flung at him. "If you hadn't done what you did last night I could have such a splendid time. And now I can't! Ah-ah-ah." Eloise was weeping.

Mr. Morehouse put his arm about her shoulders. "There, there," he said. "Tell daddy all about it."

Eloise sobbed out her trouble and her father patted her cheek reassuringly. "You go right along. I'll take care of Jane, and you'll find us on deck when you get back. You needn't worry a mite. Just because I wouldn't put up with a lot of cross-examining last night, don't you think there was anything wrong. You go right along and leave it to dad."

It took considerable reiteration, but in the end Eloise gave in. At twelve o'clock she and Dan happily boarded a Brooklyn subway express.

And, best of all, when, in the late afternoon, the girl hastened anxiously to the park rendezvous, she found that her father

had kept his word to the letter. Nevertheless, it was hard for her to act normally under the eyes of her mother and Ann that night. Such a wonderful day—and she could not talk about it.

V.

MR. MOREHOUSE had not been nursemaid for two days. Perhaps that was what made him fidgety. At any rate, he had prowled about the house, gone for inconsequential strolls, and made one telephone call. In the afternoon he repaired to a certain "ex-café" where he purchased a small flask of liquor, paying for it from an amazingly healthy roll, considering the state of the Morehouse finances. Mr. Morehouse was excited, and needed something to soothe his nerves.

Back in the flat he took one, then another stiff drink. "By golly!" he muttered, "it's got to be done!"

Not even to the silence of the apartment did he impart what "had to be done." But it was evident that he was priming himself for something out of the ordinary.

The women came home—Eloise brought Jane from the park. Dinner passed off with Mr. Morehouse a zero, conversationally. He kept looking at the clock, and after the meal was over his eyes constantly flitted from one face to the other with an air of hopeful expectancy. He seemed relieved when, in the vicinity of nine-thirty, Mrs. Morehouse and Ann, tired out by their day's efforts, went to bed.

When they had gone Mr. Morehouse sat fumbling with the evening paper and scowling at Eloise, who showed no inclination to follow her mother and sister. The clock said ten minutes to ten when Mr. Morehouse showed signs of visible distress.

"Eloise," he said, "you want to do something for your daddy?"

"Of course. What is it?"

"Well, I'm sort of nervous and I want to be alone. I wish you'd go to bed so I can sit here and think. I'm trying to figure something out and—see here, Eloise, can I trust you with a secret?"

The girl nodded. Her father pulled out a wad of money.

"Here's twenty dollars for you to spend how you like. Never mind where it came from. I'll have plenty more pretty soon. Your father's no danged fool, even if some people do think so. But I want to be alone now. So you'll go to bed like a good girl, won't you, daughter?"

"But, daddy, I can't spend this without mother knowing."

"You won't have to. I'll fix that all right. You go to bed."

"All right," she said, and made for her room at the end of the flat.

Hardly had her door closed when Mr. Morehouse was all action.

With the deftness of one who had rehearsed his part many times—at least theoretically—he slipped off his shoes, picked up a knitted couch cover which had lain in a corner, and tiptoed down the corridor to the room wherein slumbered his daughter and grand-daughter. The door was ajar, and Mr. Morehouse listened a moment before pushing it wider.

Satisfied that all was well, he entered noiselessly. A moment later he emerged, carrying the sleeping Jane, bundled up in the covering he had brought from the dining room. gingerly he got into his shoes and presently he made his way down the stairs, out of the door and into a taxicab which had been waiting for twenty minutes in front of the apartment house!

It was almost three o'clock when Mr. Morehouse returned. He carried the baby muffled as before, but now she was wide awake. The taxicab which brought them had stopped halfway down the block, and Mr. Morehouse approached the entrance of his home with exceeding caution. He hoped fervently that nobody had wakened.

But his plans for a quiet restoration of Jane to her bed were shattered the moment he passed through the outer door. The rear hall was brightly lighted and people were talking in the janitor's quarters. As Mr. Morehouse hesitated automatically halfway down the passage the voices suddenly ceased, with the exception of one—that of his daughter, Ann.

To his startled ears came the words: "Is

that the police station? Well, can you send an officer to 78 Bank Avenue right away? No—it's my father. He's taken my baby out of the house and we don't know where he's gone. No, not kidnaping. We think he's off his head—he's been acting queer lately. All right."

Mr. Morehouse rushed forward. "Hey there! Here I am and here's Jane. You're the one who's crazy, calling up the police just because—"

But Ann had seized the baby and, half laughing, half crying, was already hastening up the stairs. "Oh, Lord," groaned Mr. Morehouse. "There'll be a fine scene when I get up there."

Nevertheless he faced the tirade on the part of three angry women unflinchingly. When it had spent itself he said, "Now, if you'll let me say something I'll tell you all about it."

"You'd better," declared Ann viciously.

"All right, then. The first day I had Jane in the park some movie people were taking pictures and they needed another kid in one scene. Mr. Ellison, he's the director, came over to me and asked if they couldn't use Jane. I didn't see any harm in it, and she loved it. He gave me ten dollars that first day.

"Afterward, when I told him I was having trouble to get the baby out, he raised the price to twenty. The night I was late we had to go back to the studio for a couple of shots, and to-night they had to have the baby there again, only it was late. That's where I've been. And Jane takes to it like a duck to water. Take a look at this." He tossed a folded paper on the table.

Ann picked it up while the others crowded about her shoulders. The document was a year's contract for the services of Jane Dudley at two hundred dollars a week. Another clause provided that the child's mother should receive fifty dollars weekly for the care of Jane. The agreement was signed already by an executive of the Mammoth Film Corporation and only awaited Ann's signature to become effective.

Mr. Morehouse looked from one astounded face to the other and said quietly: "I told you I'd dig up something worth while."



His Ham and Egg Complex

By I. M. HORN

ASURPRISED, protesting yell split the droning Sundaylike atmosphere of Pyramid's main and only street. The sound of a scuffle and then through the screen door of the Miner's Rest, formerly Mike O'Brien's saloon, but now a quiet and respectable hash-house, was catapulted the figure of a man.

"Swifty" Watts picked his thin, rabbit-like figure up from the dust, voicing a string of colorful oaths. He looked undecidedly first at the door by which he had made his rapid exit, and then at the little group of three or four men lounging on the porch which ran across the front of the Rest.

Not one of them had moved or uttered a word since his sudden appearance. It was the Ole Timer, who at last ventured a remark, after squirting deliberately and accurately at the mangy hide of Indian Joe's dog, who cocked one weary eye at him be-

fore scratching, and yawningly resuming his slumbers.

"Don't pay no 'tention to him, Swifty," he admonished quietly. "You know Pole Bean's always sorry after he gits over one of these yere spells—"

"Th' blasted, crazy idjut," was Swifty's somewhat mild answer, having run out of more forceful epithets. "He'd better be gittin' over his spells. Some day a stranger w'at don't know about his disease is li'ble to mess him up so they won't be no job a-tall for th' undertaker."

"Sometimes I'm 'bout ready to believe it's a good thing us birds don't tote no artil'ry any more," soliloquized Ole Timer, as he turned toward the engineer, ignoring the sputtering Swifty. "There ain't a mite o' doubt that a few years ago, actin' the way he is now, Pole Bean would be considered a total loss, spell or no spell."

"You don't say!" The engineer was curious, but knew his audience better than to exhibit it. "First time I knew Pole Bean to have the D. T.'s. Where does he get the stuff?"

"Oh, it ain't bootleg. Wish it was, there'd be some hope for him, maybe. No, ev'ry once in so often, Pole Bean gits these attacks—we call it a ham an' egg drunk."

The engineer laughed. "Crazy about the dish, is he?"

"No, doggone it," growled Ole Timer. "Crazy *'gainst* it. He can stand watchin' 'em being et for a long time, and then some nice day, like to-day, when everything's quiet an' peaceful, one of us'll be puttin' away a pipin' dish of ham an' eggs, an' then all of a sudden Pole Bean'll git a spell. If we ain't been noticin' th' symptoms comin' on—well, you saw what happened to Swifty."

"Strange freak!" murmured the engineer, knowing that once Ole Timer was wound up, the whole story was bound to come out.

"Yeh, Minnie Ann even consulted one of the p-s-sy-cho—, th'—oh, you know th' birds I mean. Th' ones what tell you why you don't like prunes or how come a guy murders his mother-in-law."

"You mean a psychologist?"

"Sure, that's it. Down at the university at Reno, but he told her in a whole lot of big words that there warn't no hope of curin' him unless the causes could be removed. He said Pole Bean had developed a p-ss-ythic Aunt Tip-thy to ham an' eggs—anyway, that's what it sounded like when Minnie Ann told us 'bout it.

"Th' funniest thing is that Pole Bean wunst wouldn't no more a-passed up an order of ham an' eggs than he would a bunch of nuggets. W'en it came to that dish, he was th' eatinest critter you ever saw.

"Twenty years ago it started, when he was workin' a little claim next to mine back there in th' hills, an' we used to come into Pyramid two-three times a week, maybe. Mike O'Brien, Minnie Ann's father, was runnin' the saloon then, an' his wife used to dish up th' chuck, with Minnie Ann a-helpin' out at the tables.

"Minnie Ann was a ugly little cuss 'bout

sixteen or eighteen then, with the reddest hair an' the freckledest face an' the clack-igest tongue you ever hoped to see. There was a preacher fellow out here wunst—he lasted 'bout six months—an' he told Minnie Ann she could act th' part of the shrew in Mr. Shakespeer's op'ry without no make-up on. None of us thought he meant anything disrespectful, but just on general principles, well, you c'n see th' hole in the plaster in there yet where Minnie Ann let fly a whisky bottle, jest missin' him by a coon's hair. Yeh, Minnie Ann was one mean dogie.

"But a month or two after me an' Pole Bean started eatin' there kinda reg'lar, Minnie Ann begun to pay no 'tention to th' kiddin' from the rest of the gang, an' to sorta center her 'tention, you might say, on us two. Anybody could see t'wasn't me f'm the way she'd wait on Pole Bean, an' stand behind his chair ready to pile the grub up for him. She'd bring my order first, then git Pole Bean's double portion of ham an' eggs, watchin' him eat it, or flyin' off after something else he'd ask for. Pole Bean got nervous 'bout her bein' back of his neck ev'ry minit, and used to try to think up errands for her to do. Service—that was some service!

"Pole Bean had a peculiar way of eatin' this fav-rite dish of his. First, he'd cut neatlike all around the yellow of the eggs, trimmin' off the white. He'd eat that first, the white part. Then, real slowlike, he'd cut a chunk o' ham off, dip it into th' yellow an' eat each piece jest as solemn an' careful as an owl, to git th' best enjoyment out of ev'ry mouthful. It made me kinda on-easy watchin' him till I'd got used to his habits.

"I'd look up an' there would be Minnie Ann takin' it all in, jest fascinatedlike, with them light blue eyes o' hers shining like a yearling's.

"Pole Bean knew things were gittin' serious; he'd had warnin's enough. Pa an' Ma O'Brien begun to welcome him same as if he b'londed in th' family, an' Minnie Ann commenced actin' real bossylike with him. You know how a man gits his foot in suthin' like that afore he knows it. Pole Bean ain't done nothin' to encourage the romance, but the p'int is, he ain't done much to discourage it either. An'

the first thing we know Minnie Ann's got him roped an' ready for the brandin'.

"Jest about that time Pole Bean begins to wear a kinda hunted look, an' to sit out there at t' lake fishin', for long spells, 'thout sayin' a word. Wunst or twicet, he got Indian Joe to take him out in his boat over to Pelican Island. But when he drug in a big catch o' th' prettiest trout you'd ever saw, Minnie Ann made such a big fuss over him that he don't go no more.

"Then one day, Ma O'Brien begins to plannin' the big spread they is goin' to have for the weddin' feast, and Minnie Ann driv th' buckboard into Reno to load her up with fancy chuck an' fixin's.

"I'd come over from my diggin's that day—it was a We'n'sday I mind, and th' first time I'd been in to Pyramid since Sunday. I ain't seen Pole Bean since then either, as he didn't go along back to th' mine when I left.

"Ain't no sign of him aroun' th' s'loon, and Mike said he thought he'd gone on back with me Sunday.

"While I was a-thinkin' it over after lunch, I took a stroll down to th' lake. The wind was a-cuttin' up some, and, man, you ain't seen Pyramid Lake yet when she gits into action, have ye? Th' waves was a-comin' in just like combers. You'd a-thought it was th' Pacific instid of this freak bowl of water 'way up here in th' mountains. Just afore I got over there to Rock Point w'ich is where we mostly fishes from, I met Indian Joe comin' from that direction.

"What you got there, Joe?" I asks him.

"Looks like Boss Pole Bean clo'se," Joe holds 'em out to me.

"An' danged if it ain't, too. There's Pole Bean's shirt an' pants, his miner's boots an' his ole hat. Joe had found 'em on a big rock near th' water. Th' big storm broke just about then, an' they wasn't a trace of him to be found. Pole Bean had committed suicide!"

"But what, that is—here he is, isn't he?" began the engineer in some bewilderment.

"Yeh, he's here, an' likely to stay, too! Yuh can't catch a mouse twice with th' same piece of bacon—" He gave the engineer a prodigious wink.

"Howsumever, Minnie Ann took on somethin' awful w'en th' news was broke to her, an' they sent Indian Joe out to drag the lake an' git the body. He ain't findin' nothin' but charged old man O'Brien five dollars just the same.

"After a while, life settled down again yere aroun' Pyramid to 'bout as usual. I admit things was some livelier then, than they is since this prohibition outbreak. Anyways, I took over Pole Bean's claim an' worked th' two of 'em. Some of th' men drifted away to new diggin's, others drifted in. The old man passed out w'en th' gov'ment wanted him to serve ginger ale 'stid o' red eye, an' after that Minnie Ann an' her mother turned th' place into a reg'lar hotel, with or without meals, tho' they ain't nobody comes out this way now like in th' old days.

"One day th' Tri-State Comp'ny sent a truckload of bums out here to some new op'rations they was startin' down near the Indian Reservation. The whole gang stopped off at the Miner's Rest to git a meal. I was eatin' there, too, that day, an' pretty soon we heerd a shriek from Minnie Ann an' a whole tray full of cups and plates and bread an' soup flew up in the air, an' came down with a crash.

"It's himself, come back from th' dead!" yells Minnie Ann, hy-sterical, an' drapes herself on to a tall, lanky fellow with long drooping mustaches, a bald head an' dark eyeglasses, who had come in with this new bunch o' miners. He sat there kinda swayin', actin' like he didn't know whether th' woman was crazy or not.

"I pushed through th' gang that had collected round them, an' took hold o' Minnie Ann.

"Don't go actin' silly, Minnie Ann," I says. "She lost her man some fifteen years ago," I says, apologizin' like to th' stranger, "an' it's kinda affected her, I guess—"

"But it's *him!* It's *him!*" cries out Minnie Ann. "Sixteen years come April, but I'd know that ham an' egg eatin' way of his anywhere—" An' Minnie Ann swoons against him, so that this time he had to put his arm 'round her to keep her from slippin' on to th' floor.

"Pole Bean, for it was him, sure as

shootin', explains after ev'rybody had quieted down some'ut, how he'd lost his mem'ry suddenly an' when he'd come to he was down in San Francisco, never remembrin' how he got there, or where he'd come from.

"Oh, sure, they was married—right away, as you might say. An' it was shortly after that he took those spells about ham an' eggs. Minnie Ann says he ain't touched a plateful since that first day he came back. Kinda sickened on 'em, looks like. She even give 'em to him wunst, a platter of 'em right in th' face—said she'd larn him to throw her best customers out th' door—but it didn't do no good. Us all feel kinda sorry

for him, so we stand for his little spells 'best we can."

"But, gosh!" exclaimed the engineer, "if that's the way he felt about it, what'd he ever come back here for—"

"Sonny," said the Ole Timer, as he carefully cut another chaw, "ain't you never heerd that murderers always return to th' scene of their crime? Pole Bean told me, strickly private, that after Indian Joe had rowed him down to th' Indian Reservation that day, an' helped him cover his tracks by makin' us believe he'd committed suicide, that he'd never had a minit's rest till he'd come back yere an' seen if he really *had* fooled Minnie Ann."

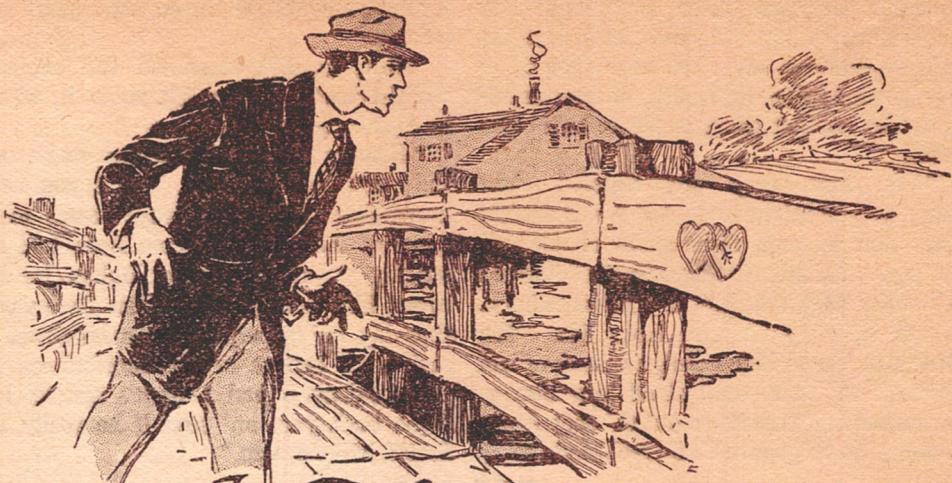
THE END

THE HOME HILLS

A-WANDERING from the snowfields
 To where the roses bloom,
 A-wandering from ice winds
 To breezes of perfume.
 Alert for every pleasure,
 Agog for every bliss,
 I wonder why, I ponder why,
 There's something that I miss.

A-journeying for pleasure,
 Through green of palm and pine,
 A-journeying where sunbeams
 Each day are sure to shine.
 Alive to every blessing
 Attune to joys like this,
 I question why, I query why,
 There's something that I miss.

A-traversing the broad lands,
 With lakes like jewels set,
 A-traversing the fair lands
 How can I feel regret.
 Athrill to Nature's music,
 Aglow to Nature's kiss,
 And yet, I'm homesick for the hills,
 The home hills that I miss.



A Forgotten Engagement

By **JOHN HOLDEN**

NOW that he was back in the bleak land of his boyhood, Gordon Cass was mildly regretful that his aristocratic fiancée was with him.

It was not that the already famous young lawyer was ashamed of his humble birth and rude upbringing. Never had he been snobbish enough to conceal from Vera Worland any phase of his remarkable career. He had detailed many episodes of his early life in this backwoods district of Canada; and Vera had always been fascinated by his recital.

But Vera didn't belong here, even as a visitor. She was out of the picture. She intruded. This bare and bumpy road, and the stony fields that stretched away to scrubby backgrounds of stunted trees, were for women of another type—the kind Cass had known in his youth, heavy of hand and deliberate of foot, creatures of much strength and little grace, slow to bestow affection, but stanch in fidelity. It seemed

somehow a gesture of disrespect to his dead mother to bring into the neighborhood a girl so utterly different from what she had been; this gay and winsome creature of fashion and furbelows, culture and fragility, who couldn't milk a cow or pitch a load of hay to save her toilless life.

Cass hadn't wanted to bring Vera. The idea had been hers, and he hadn't had the heart to refuse her.

Cass had come from New York to spend a short vacation with the Worlands at their Canadian summer camp, some thirty miles distant on the shore of a pleasant lake, and he had meant to slip away from them to this untraveled portion of the Ontario hinterland. But Vera, learning of his plan, had insisted that she and her stalwart brother Tom should motor Cass to Bullock's Corners, leave him there with his old friends overnight, and call for him next day.

Cass's diplomatic efforts to dissuade her had been fruitless, and so here they were—

bowling along the rutty road in a luxurious touring car, past the little old gray schoolhouse of his childhood, and the little wooden bridge that spanned the creek with its old swimming hole, and past all the other commonplace features of the drab landscape which, nevertheless, held for him such poignant memories and rich associations.

Vera was enjoying the novelty of the scene. She asked if the schoolhouse was the one which he once had told her about, and Cass replied that it was; and then, as the car rattled over the bridge, she said:

"And this is the bridge where you made that boyish compact with your little sweetheart?"

Cass looked at Vera. "Oh!" said he. "Did I tell you about that?"

"Of course. A pretty story it was, too. I hope you're not sorry you told me."

"Oh, no."

Nevertheless, Cass felt in a vague way that he *was* sorry. He wondered how he had come to tell Vera, and realized that it was natural enough.

In New York his juvenile affairs with Zella Schwab had seemed a matter of no importance, an incident of his boyhood about which he might speak freely since it had happened long before in a far country. But now that he was at the actual scene of its happening, with Zella Schwab perhaps still living in the neighborhood, the incident seemed somehow to have acquired dignity if not importance. Cass hoped that Vera would say no more on the subject.

With feminine perversity, she did.

"What was it that you and she carved on the railing of the bridge? Twin hearts, wasn't it—yours and hers?" Cass didn't reply, and Vera continued: "And then you each made a solemn promise that if either ever desired help from the other, the needy one should cut an arrow inside his or her carved heart to indicate pain, and the other, seeing it, should hurry to the rescue."

"Please, Vera," said Cass, "let's not talk about it. We were merely children then. A barefoot boy in short pants and shirt and cowbite hat and a barefoot girl in pinny and pigtails."

"Still, the promise was to hold good indefinitely."

"I believe it was. But childish promises don't bind adults."

Vera patted his hand. "Of course not, Gordon. I'm just teasing you. I won't mention the subject again, since you don't seem to like it."

The big car was by this time nearing a road intersection where stood a general store that also advertised itself as a hotel, while on the corner opposite stood a combined blacksmith shop and gasoline station. The car stopped. Cass alighted and asked Tom Worland to wait.

"Want to make sure the hotel part of this place is still doing business before I let you go," he remarked.

It was, though the present proprietor, whom Cass did not know, observed that, since the coming of motor cars, guests were few and far between. Cass registered and went out to say good-by to his fiancée and her brother. He held Vera's hand for a moment and secretly regretted his slight vexation when they passed the schoolhouse and the bridge.

Vera was a darling girl, and he had been amazingly fortunate in having won her consent to become his wife. He stood watching the handkerchief that she waved as the big car went back down the road it had come, then turned to view more intently the old familiar Corners.

Except for the gasoline station, everything was almost exactly as he had left it, fifteen years before; the same atmosphere of leisure and quietness, the same old farmhouses here and there along the roads. He realized that this was a wonderfully soothing spot, much more so than the fashionable lake resort to which Vera and Tom were returning. Compared to it, New York was a bedlam.

Cass strolled down the road in the direction of his old home, which was now in the hands of strangers, and presently the years he had spent away from the Corners seemed to fall from him and he was a boy again. He thought of how he had lived then—days filled with health-giving physical toil and nights free from worry, the sweet scent of earth ever in his nostrils, the rustle of leaves and waving grain and the cheerful song of birds in his ears. He wondered if, after

all, he was so very much better off than those of his old comrades who had elected to remain here.

Glancing, farmerlike, at the descending sun, he realized that the afternoon was merging into evening and he would better return to the hotel. He did so, and sat down to the homely fare with a good appetite.

After supper two of the old gang appeared, William Bridle and Andy Holt, and greeted Cass with manifestations of pleasure.

"We hear you're a great New York lawyer now, Gordon," said Bridle.

"Not great as yet, though prosperous enough," Cass admitted. "At that, I don't know that I'm so much better off than you fellows. You seem to lead a quiet, contented, happy life here. I'm not so sure that I can say the same of myself."

"Married yet?" queried Bridle.

"No. Haven't been able to afford anything like that till just lately. Different in that respect from you fellows, I suppose, with all my so-called success."

"Well, we ain't hooked up, either. And we've got no nice wife in sight, like you have."

"As I have?" Cass exclaimed in surprise.

"Haw, haw!" Bridle slapped Cass on the shoulder. "Think we don't know about that fine lookin' girl that brought you here this afternoon, heh?"

"I guess you're right," Cass admitted with a glow of pride. "That was my fiancée."

"Any one could 'a' told that, just from the way you looked at her, or so I've been told by folks that saw you. Wanted to make us envious, I suppose."

"Envious? How could I do that? You've got nice looking girls here—at least, you did have."

"Did have, yes; they're mostly all married off now."

"Mostly?" Zella Schwab was in Cass's mind, but he didn't want to mention her name. Dear little Zella, with whom he had made that absurd compact! He hoped that she had married well and was happy.

"Your old girl is still runnin' around

without a halter on," Andy Holt informed him. "You know—the one you was sort of engaged to once, though I dare say you've forgotten all about that long ago—Zella Schwab."

Cass was surprised. "How is it that so good looking a girl as Zella isn't married?"

The men exchanged significant glances. "Dunno," said Holt, "unless maybe she got a notion that you'd come back and get her."

"Oh, quit kidding."

Holt grinned. "Yes, we were kidding, Gordon. I don't know why Zella never married. She's had chances enough. And yet there she is, keeping house for her old man that's all alone now except for her, and going less and less to the dances and shindigs that she used to be so keen for."

"Probably thinks she's better off single," Cass observed, and then turned the conversation into another channel. For several hours he talked with Bridle and Holt and others who dropped in at the general store, then he went upstairs to his room and to bed.

He thought he could go to sleep at once, but, strangely enough, he couldn't. Thoughts of Zella Schwab kept intruding. And when he did lose himself in slumber at last, Cass dreamed that he and she were again on the little bridge near the old schoolhouse, carving hearts in the railing with his new jackknife.

Next morning Cass roamed around the old farm, after obtaining permission to do so from the present owner, and again he was disturbed by recurring thoughts of the Zella he had known. There, for instance, under the wild pear tree in the lane, he and she had once picked pears; there, in the open field at the end of the lane, still stood the old barn, past which they had driven cows in fear and trembling because darkness had fallen and whippoorwills were uttering their eerie cries and the gaunt old structure was said to be haunted.

Cass wondered what Zella looked like now. Had she grown big and coarse during his fifteen years' absence? Could she compare in any way with the cultured girl to whom he was engaged?

He thought that he would like to call on Zella. And then he decided that, since Vera Worland had come to the Corners with him and would return for him that evening, it would be just as well to keep away from Zella. Because, after all, he really had once engaged himself to marry her; a juvenile engagement such as did not count in the world of men and women, but one that was sincere enough at the time. There was a possibility that Zella had clung to the thought of that engagement throughout the years, and if so it might be embarrassing to see her.

At the lower end of the farm Cass decided to cut across the adjoining farm to the next crossroad, and thus take a short cut to the schoolhouse which he and Vera Worland had passed in the car. He did so, picking out the route he occasionally had used in the old days, and presently he stood in the old, vacation-deserted school-yard.

How different, he thought, from city schoolyards, with their hard concrete surfaces and cramped boundaries. Lots of room here for ball games. Lots of shade beneath the big trees.

He uttered an exclamation as he came upon his initials, clear and distinct, just as he had cut them in the wall of an out-building so many years before. Hereabouts, things did not change very much. Cass left the schoolyard and rambled on toward the bridge.

He wondered if the hearts that he and Zella Schwab had cut in the railboard were still there. Probably they would be, since his initials were still on the schoolyard fence.

The thought of finding those twin hearts gave him a little thrill. He recollects the childish compact that he and Zella had made.

Cass approached the bridge. How absurdly small it seemed. He used to think it was a big bridge. And worn, too, so that probably the carved hearts were no longer visible. On the right-hand railing they ought to be.

They were there. Clearly visible, just as his initials were in the schoolyard. He looked closer—and caught his breath.

Cut clearly and distinctly inside one of the hearts was an arrow!

Cass had not cut it there, so Zella must have. She had needed him and he had failed her.

It was an uncomfortable thought. Cass looked again at the carved arrow and saw that it looked old, though not so old as the hearts. Some time during the past five years, perhaps, the old sweetheart of his boyhood had called upon him for help and he had not responded; could not respond because he was far away winning fame and fortune in the great metropolis.

He wondered what crisis in the life of Zella Schwab had caused her to make that inarticulate appeal to him. Cass knew he was illogical and foolish, yet he felt a pang of the keenest regret because he had not been present to note the sign of distress when it was made and respond to it.

Was it too late to do so? He wondered. Zella still lived in the neighborhood. Why should he not call on her, and ask what it was she had wanted, and learn if he could still help her?

He was under no obligation to do so, of course; but it would be a kindly thing to do. Zella was nothing to him now, but once she had been.

For a long time Cass stood upon the bridge, elbows on the railing, pondering wistfully the things that used to be. And then with slow steps he made his way toward the old Schwab homestead, where, according to Holt and Bridle, Zella lived alone with her father.

Now that he had made up his mind to visit Zella, Cass could think of nothing but her. He realized that, for the time being at least, Vera Worland stood second in his thoughts, and he felt a little pang of disloyalty because such was the case.

Old recollections flooded his mind—the first time he had been bold enough to walk home with Zella, the day when he kissed her. His first kiss! Had any other ever been so ecstatic?

What a vision of loveliness Zella had been. How plump and pleasing; not scrawny and skinny and long-legged like the other schoolgirls, but robust and merry and full of energy. It was queer how he had

forgotten all those things. He could recollect them clearly enough now. He thrilled at the prospect of seeing again the almost forgotten sweetheart of the old days when life was new and wonderful and not stressed with ambition and struggle.

Cass noted, as he approached the Schwab habitation, that the place looked forlorn and neglected. No fault of Zella's, of course. She couldn't help it if her father was lazy and shiftless.

He crossed the big, bare yard, littered with odds and ends of farming implements, where a more progressive farmer would have had green grass and shrubbery, and, walking around the house to the rear, he mounted two broken steps to a shaky veranda and knocked on the open kitchen door.

It was not Zella who came to meet Cass, but her father. The man's appearance gave the New Yorker a shock. Schwab looked old and bent and worn out; as different from the man he had been as a sun-dried boot is different from one in a store window.

"Know me, Mr. Schwab? I'm Gordon Cass; I used to live around here."

The old man's mouth dropped open. "Little Gordie Cass that went and made a great lawyer of hisself!" He extended a gnarled hand, which Cass shook heartily. "Come right in and set down. Zella, she'll be as glad to see you as I am."

"You're both well, I hope," said Cass, taking a seat in the kitchen.

"Middlin', Gordie, just middlin'. Zella, she's all right, but me, I'm not so good with the rheumatiz." Mr. Schwab went to the door and called: "Oh, Zel-la!" He returned and said: "She's a comin' fast. Out behind the barn feedin' the chickens, she was."

A pail clanged on the veranda outside and a huge form filled the doorway. Cass jumped to his feet and stared at the stranger.

Surely this woman couldn't be Zella Schwab! Zella was a little girl. This woman was big, huge; twice the size of old Mr. Schwab; perhaps half as big again as Cass himself.

"Oh, Gordie Cass! It's you!" She bore down upon the New Yorker and clasped his

hand in a paw that was as soft and clammy and big as a kneading of dough.

"You—you're Zella?" Cass exclaimed, because even yet he could scarcely believe that it really was she.

"Who else, Gordie?"

They sat down and exchanged long looks of appraisal, Zella apparently as much surprised by Cass's dapper appearance as he was by her size and general uncouthness. Her arms were as big as an ordinary person's legs, her bust was like a barrel, the chair she sat on was a mere stool in comparison with her bulk. And this was the girl who once had been his sweetheart!

"Are you really a great lawyer?" asked Zella. "Tell us the truth, Gordie. Some say you are, an' some say you're just throwing a bluff like everybody does that goes to the city."

"Oh, I'm a lawyer all right, but not so great. Just middlin', as your father would say." Cass briefly outlined his career to date.

It was nearing noon now and Zella set about getting something to eat. She set a table in the musty old parlor, and started in the kitchen stove a wood fire that brought rivulets of perspiration to her red face.

She made so much fuss that Cass begged her to take no special pains on his account. She replied that she certainly would take pains because his visit was something to celebrate, and then she served dinner—huge slices of bread and half melted butter, boiled potatoes with their jackets on and a huge platter of fried eggs. Cass ate the unpalatable food with an effort and gallantly complimented Zella upon her cooking.

The old man picked up his hat soon after dinner and remarked: "Well, I got to be going, Gordie; can't earn a livin' just settin' around and talkin' like you lawyers do."

"I'll go with you," Cass volunteered. "I'd like to look at the farm."

Keen as had been his desire to do something for his old sweetheart who had called to him by means of the arrow in the carved heart, he had no desire now to be left alone with her. But Zella halted him.

"I'll take you around, Gordie, after

we've had a nice little chat. You'll feel more like seein' things then."

So Cass watched the old man drag himself off to the fields and then braced himself in his chair, resolved to face bravely whatever was in store.

Zella brought up one topic after another, and finally she swung the conversation around to the subject of matrimony, with specific comments on the conjugal adventures of old schoolmates.

"I hear you're still single," she remarked with a giggle.

"Oh, yes." Cass wanted to state that he was engaged, but he feared that if he did he would have to bring Vera Worland's name into the conversation, and he felt a sudden reluctance to do that.

"You used to be engaged once, Gordie."

"As a child, yes," Cass admitted with a sigh. "Children do the silliest things, you know."

"A child, Gordie? You was fifteen then and as big almost as you are now."

"Ye-es, I've heard that I was big at that age."

"Engaged you were," repeated Zella, "and to no less a person than me. Do you mean to say you don't remember?"

"Indeed, I do remember, Zella. It was an honor, I assure you."

"But, of course, you forgot it when you went off."

"Not for a long time, Zella. But eventually, of course. Just as you did. Children always forget engagements of that sort."

"Ye-es, I suppose so," said Zella slowly.

"Still, I'm sorry I wasn't on hand when you called on me for help. I would have been glad to assist you had I been in the neighborhood at the time."

"Huh? What's that?" Zella looked at him.

"The carved hearts, I mean."

"Ye-es, the carved hearts." Zella was staring at him and looking either uncommonly stupid or disarmingly calculating, Cass couldn't quite tell which. "What about the carved hearts, Gordie?"

Cass tapped the bare kitchen floor with his foot. He would so much rather be outdoors. But he had come to face this situation, and face it he must.

"Why, the arrow that you carved in the heart that was supposed to be yours, of course. It was in answer to that call for help that I came here to-day."

"Well!" exclaimed Zella, and stared at him. "You came to help me! How did you figure on doing it?"

Cass felt very uncomfortable. "Why—er—I might lend you a little money or something, I suppose."

"The idea! I wouldn't think of taking your money."

"Not—not money?" Cass inquired weakly.

"Not anything. I never asked any help from you. And I don't know what you mean—talking crazylike about an arrow in a heart."

Cass felt a quick surge of relief.

"You—you don't remember that we made an agreement about cutting an arrow in one of the hearts?"

Zella shook her head slowly, then suddenly brightened. "Why, yes, I do, too. Just this minute it came to me. The one that wanted the other was to cut an arrow. But I never cut any. I never wanted you." She smiled coyly. "You're sure you didn't want me and cut the arrow yourself?"

Undoubtedly Zella was serious. She wasn't playing a deep game.

"Quite sure, Zella."

"Then some one must 'a' been playing a trick on us."

"Looks like it. But who?"

"I can't even guess."

Cass rose. "Oh, well. What's it matter, now that you're not in need of anything? I'm delighted to have seen you, anyhow. Guess I'll have to hurry off; it's getting late." He picked up his hat.

Zella walked out into the yard with him, and said good-by there, and as he walked away Cass looked back once and saw her striding toward the barn with pails in her hands. He quickened his footsteps until he reached the road.

"So that is Zella Schwab," said he to himself, slowly and wonderingly.

He regretted that Bridle and Holt were not at the crossroads store when he arrived there so that he might question them regarding the arrow. But, after all, what did

it matter? One of the local boys had played the trick on him; one who had learned of the compact back in the old days and still remembered it. Which one was a matter of no consequence. The whole business could now be dismissed from his mind. And most certainly it would be.

Cass was overjoyed to see Vera when she returned in the car an hour later. Lovely and desirable as she had appeared previously, she now looked far more so. He was glad to find himself speeding back to the civilization of the up-to-date summer resort.

The primitive life of Bullock's Corners was all very well for twenty-four hours, thought Cass, but for the spending of a lifetime it never again could satisfy him. He had ascended too far above it. He did not hesitate to tell all these things to Vera.

"But still I'm puzzled about that arrow in the carved heart," he added. "I can't, for the life of me, figure out who put it there."

"A really good lawyer should be able to solve such a small mystery as that," said Vera mockingly, with the radiant smile that Cass adored.

"I suppose so—and yet I can't."
"I can."

Cass stared at her. "You? What do you know about it? How did you find out? And who was it that did it?"

"I myself, learned sir," Vera replied. "With my little penknife, I carved that arrow in the heart. I made Tom stop the car, going back from the Corners yesterday, and I searched for your romantic little carving, and found it, and did the foul deed because I knew you'd go to look at it."

"But the cut in the wood looked as though it had been made some time ago."

"A matter of staining it with mud and motor oil, my dear boy."

"But why did you do it, Vera? What was your idea?"

"Silly man! So you'd look up your old sweetheart and either elope with her or put her out of your mind. Do you think I want a husband that's haunted by an old affair like that? Not much! I want all of you or none at all."

Cass sighed happily. "Well, you've got me. I hope to die if I ever waste another thought on Zella Schwab."

THE END

DISSATISFACTION

OH, I used to complain when my fate made me struggle
Within cramped confines and an unfriendly sphere.
We never know when some persistent old bug 'll

Be making us want to be elsewhere than here.
I was restless and blue till I went to the zoo
And saw there the things that environments do.

The emus that raced through the Australian bushes
Are jailed in a poor little two-by-four pen;
The polar his nose so disconsolately pushes
And wishes for Antarctic icebergs again.
And the hyenas pace in a mean little space,
Eying us all with a world-weary face.

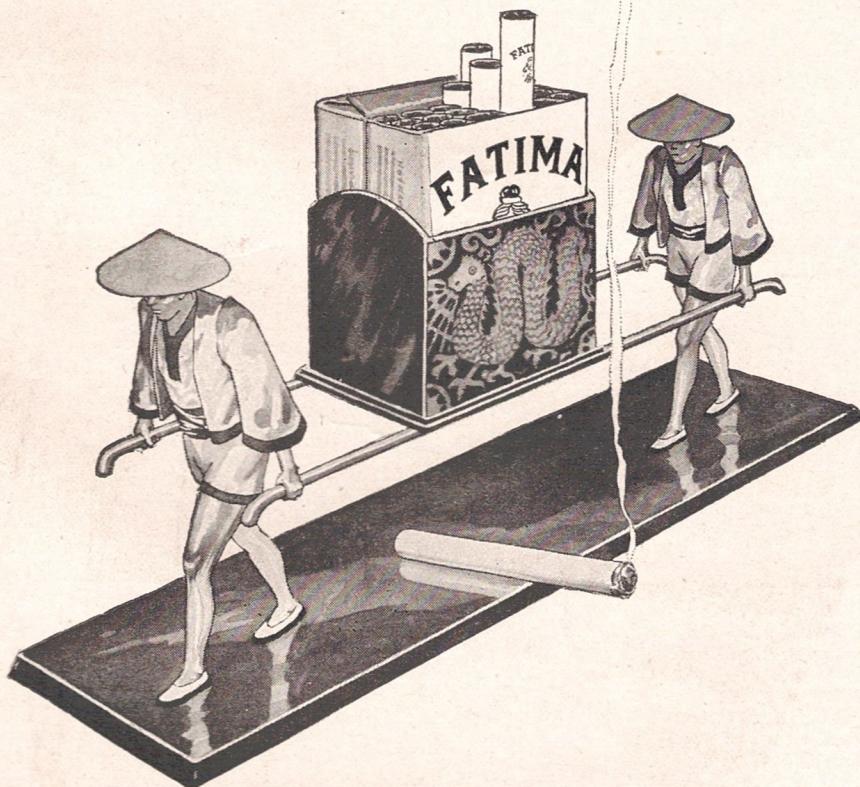
The monkeys that swung in the Amazon jungles
Now hang so forlorn from an eighteen-inch bar.
Ah, what a sad case! Surely somebody bungles
In causing such states that must certainly jar.
Oh, the polars are hot and the tigers are not,
Then why in the world should I pity my lot?

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.

10 A

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